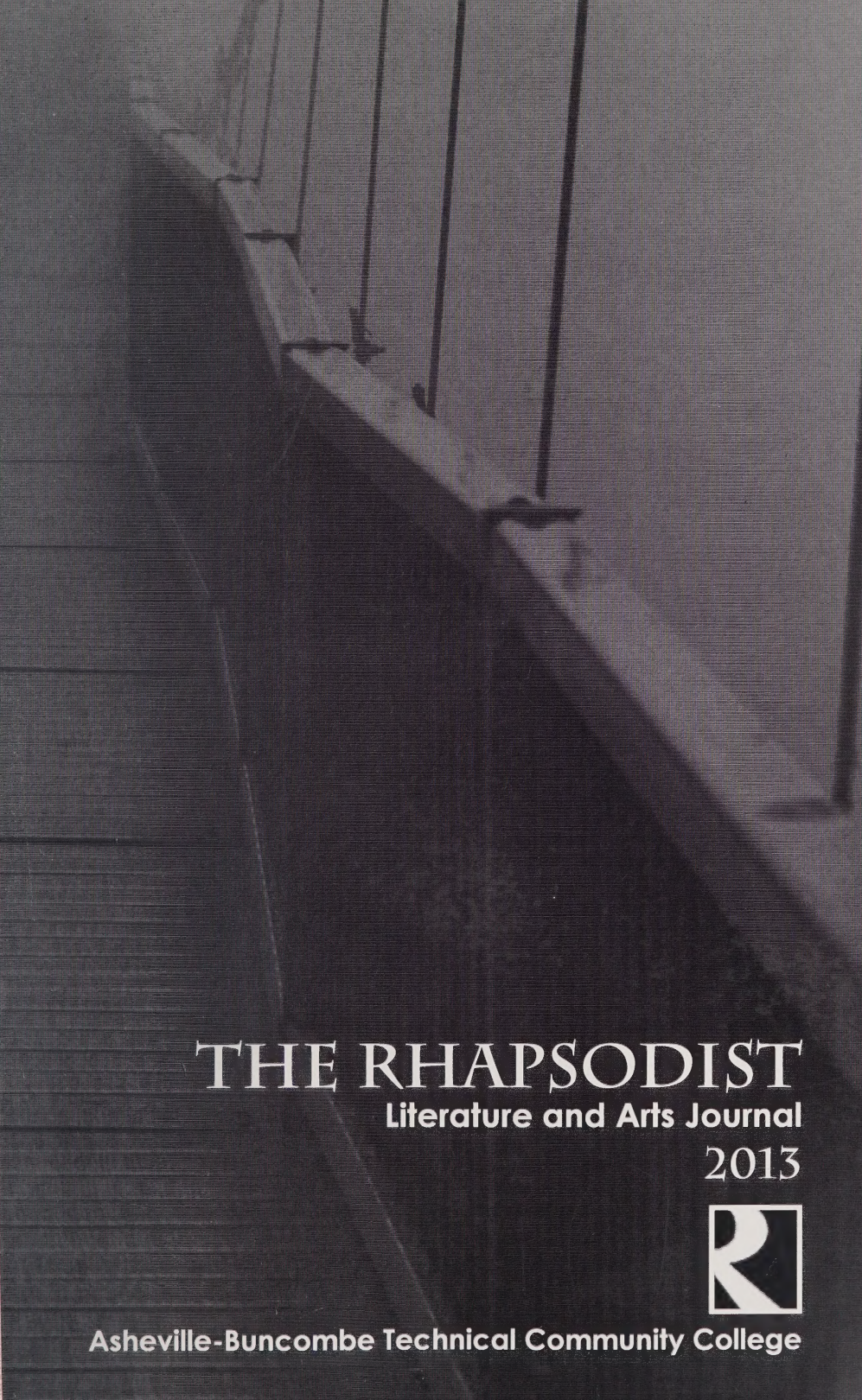
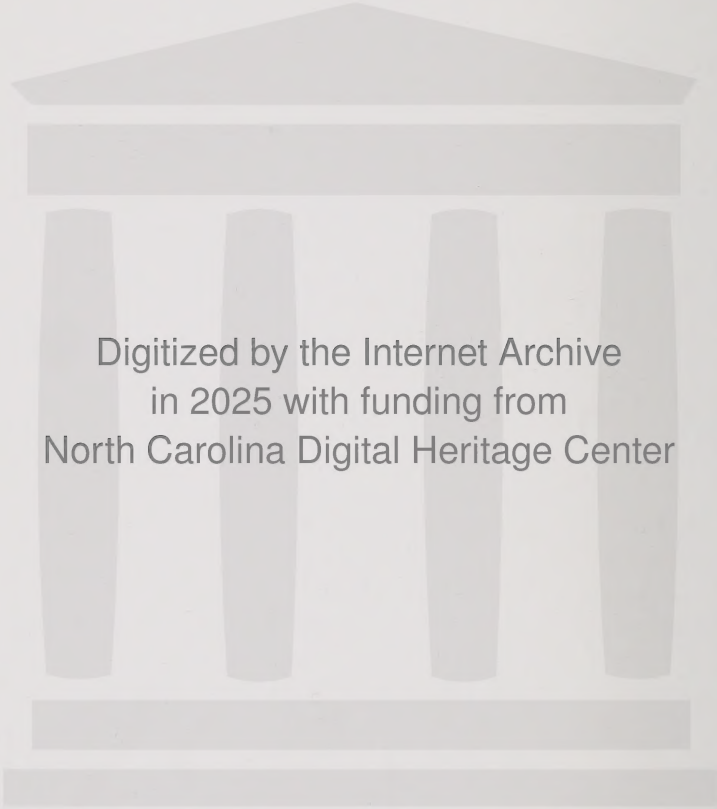


THE RHAPSODIST

Literature and Arts Journal

2013

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College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The Rhapsodist

Spring 2013

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College
Asheville, NC

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Editor's Note:

"Pursue, keep up with, circle round and round your life, as a dog does his master's chaise. Do what you love. Know your own bone; gnaw at it, bury it, unearth it, and gnaw it still."

—Thoreau

Dear Reader,

As A-B Tech's primary venue for literary and fine art, *The Rhapsodist* showcases some of the finest examples of creative expression from our diverse student body. Thus, we are overjoyed this year to present our second annual issue. We have selected a variety of work—some of which address the theme of transformation and change, and all of which stimulates thought and emotion. There are familiar artists as well as some new "faces." Once again, these artists have shared their visions and presented them to us gratis. In an environment where nearly everything has a price tag, we invite you to enjoy the largesse of your peers and colleagues. May this collection encourage you, reader, to "circle round and round your life...and gnaw at it still."

Curtis, Charles P., and Ferris Greenslet, eds. *The Practical Cogitator: The Thinker's Anthology.* 3rd ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962. 83.

Thanks for your support!

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rhapsodist, n.

Pronunciation: Brit. /'rapsədəst/ , U.S. /'ræpsədəst/
Etymology: < rhapsody n. + -ist suffix. Compare French rhapsodiste ...

1. A collector of miscellaneous literary pieces. Now hist. and rare.

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A-B Tech's Student Services Department

"rhapsodist." *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 3rd ed. *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, 2011.Web. 8 March 2012.

Change by whitney o'friel

The Explorers
by andy marshall

Like a mist upon the mountains she hovers over me,

A gentle caress with intent to cling.

The sunrise in her eyes, the endless blue sky of her soul shines through,

She takes in my kiss as if it were a long cold draught after a week of haggard thirst,

The feel of my body as if it were the shade of a strong, towering oak,

And she feels safety in my shade.

A storm of emotions,

Our eyes speak "desire" in tongues unknowable,

Her touch is lightning,

her breathing the sweet song of rolling thunder,

Her hair is a heavy rain, obscuring light and blurring vision, falling around my face

As my nose fills with a flowered scent that can only be hers.

And in being so, is mine alone, and I realize that I,
I have always been fond of the rain.

We take one another in,

Eager explorers of a land left unmapped,

Equal partners in a pilgrimage to the lost land of Sincerity,

To the sanctuary that's been formed between us, visited time and time again, a path well known,

Landscape ever changing, the trees we've planted
Now grow with an ever-branching embrace.

Over the smooth plains,

And across the shivering peaks of flesh,

An earthquake, strong and constant, takes the landscape,

And yet we roam, steady hands to shaking hips, until our strength has failed us,

The dwindling light of day, and in her pleased smile,

Her twinkling eyes, the only sunset I desire.

Tea

by abigail batton

I thought of you today and nearly collapsed from the weight of it all. I was in the grocery store, aisle four, stocking up on my tea collection. You know the kind, Twinings English Breakfast, the red box. I shoved my arm behind the stack to scoop the entire row into my cart, as is my way. Suddenly, my knees buckled and had it not been for my husband, tipping my elbow to balance my body, I believed I would have deflated to the floor. And you know how I feel about public floors. All the filth and droppage from other humans piling up to my ankles in its sneaky way. So it was good that I had my husband. But then, it was my husband who tipped the balance in our friendship, leaving us both on the floor as time and events accrued between us.

The moment passed quickly, by the time I got to dairy, I felt right as rain. The agony of the tea aisle as far away as Dankins Strawberry Yogurt is to Hershey's Cocoa. And yet, like cayenne pepper, or curry, the scent of our friendship lingered in my eyes and made them sting from the encounter. I have stored the whole of our decline into the freezer section of my brain. It sits there, taking up space, until I am able to thaw and soften to what actually happened. Thawing takes time, and in our unspoken way, I suppose that is what we are doing. It has been many long months since we sat on your porch eating Cool Ranch Doritos, you pulling hard on a cigarette, me shifting my body to miss the exhaling smoke. I never told you, but I used to tie my hair back into a hard knot for our porch visits to avoid the smoke inhabiting my hair.

I live in another town, now, up on a mountain. It is one of the prettiest places I have ever seen. Rivers and lakes and all kinds of trees. It serves as a visual retreat, an inverse contrast to the oily city and the unending need of the poor seen in the place we met. My new mountain town cleanses my palate and promises to heal the scars that remain from viewing our former landscape. In the winter the trees stand up strong against the snow and wind. They bend and strain against the force. After a storm the roads are littered with the branches that broke under the pressure. The local volunteer fire department shows up emerging from pick-up trucks displaying the various degrees of capital, depending on the size of the truck, or, in some cases, the size of the tires. They hop out, their mountain boots landing on the cold earth with confidence, each one grabbing an axe or chainsaw from the truck bed to get to work. This small town knows how to clean up its messes.

In the spring of our friendship, we were the envy of the forest with our malleability and strength. Nature pounded against us, it seemed, yet after every storm, we stood up tall and stretched to the sun, our limbs undamaged, our spirits

undaunted. Until that one day. Perhaps it was the strength of that particular storm, or maybe we were unknowingly weakened by all that bad weather before this storm. But that day, the storm shattered our limbs and left them broken in the public streets and there was no truck big enough, or chainsaw loud enough to pick up our mess. That storm involved your husband, so perhaps it was only fitting that my husband provided the fury for our last one. That was the beginning, I suppose, the beginning of our end.

When I got home from the grocery store today I put the kettle on for tea. It is a motion I perform so frequently that it requires little participation from my brain. This was a good thing, because my brain was busy bolstering up a new appeal against your silent allegations, a fresh way to make you see things my way, on my terms, in my time. I hold court with you every so often, but unlike your Law and Order episodes, the season just runs on and on, no definitive plot twist, no closing argument. The kettle sang, interrupting my thoughts and as I spooned the sugar into the hot water, I had already shaken you off, fortified your fortress in the freezer.

When I moved out of the apartment to marry and live on the mountain, we had already entered the silent phase of our friendship. The words that had been piling up between us had already spilled over and avalanched us under their pain and precision. You have probably forgotten by now, but you asked me to store your turkey in my freezer. This was a good arrangement because my freezer remained mostly empty due to my inability to cook well. Your casseroles and soups warmed my children's bellies during my Keebler Elf fascination. Once we found the courage, or was it anger, to throw our words across the silence, once we remembered to tally the points and to keep a measured score, we forgot about the turkey in my old freezer. That apartment is long since emptied and released from its burden of housing my children, me, your children, our friendship. When I had the electricity turned off, I never considered that turkey. I was facing forward by that time, looking into my husband's face rather than straining my neck to look back for something I might have missed. I had stopped hoping in us by then. I sometimes wonder in what state of decay that turkey was found. Who was left with the task of cleaning up that horrid mess and disposing of the carcass. You remain frozen in time. I have chosen to remember you the old way, before we broke apart in the big storm. I hope those with confident footing have gathered around to help discard the decay and tend to your new blooms.

I Ate the Bitter Weed of Winter

by carolyn pidgeon

I ate the bitter weed of winter
That steeled my heart
And made me seek cold corners,
Where I could scream my disdain
Down the hollow hopeless streets,
Where the last litter of leaves scuttled,
Like brown paper mice
Along continual curbs.
Neither the concrete nor the wind
Could absorb my voice, my anger.
Rather my loud voice reverberated,
Against the walls and columns
Like the rabble rousing of a racquetball.
Till mitts over ears I cried.

I had my salacious summers.
Tempting cascades of fruit and foliage,
From well–tended marble gardens,
Their gargoyle fountains drinking from artesian wells
Deep in the stone dark earth,
As well as the wild lush
Of lavender fields embracing hilltops.
I have been drunk with them,
But now they are dim images,
Grapes washed in cold rain,
Offering no warmth,
As memories should
To the sleet crusted streets,
To the bruising breath of winter.

Lines, a Minor Key
by stacie sexton

Things are linear. Things move along straight lines. Yet they have an overwhelming ability to become dynamic and reroute themselves. Of course, this movement can only be seen within the context of one's mind, just beyond the point where the sun sets heavy and the coffee cups sit empty upon the dinner table.

Things are linear the way most things are also beautiful. A girl with an awkward posture might never find solace in the mirror of her mother's gaze, but a new day dawns when the jarring lilt of a revered soprano escapes from her cautious mouth. Exactly, and rightly so, in the manner that one might find three quarters at the bottom of the washing machine after neglecting to do the laundry for almost a month's time.

Things become dynamic when someone just happens to overhear conversations swirling around and tap dancing quite loudly in the first booth of the café. Maybe cigarettes are involved. A sinfully indulgent slice of cheesecake is almost always to be implicated as an accomplice. The through-line is formed, held tightly in the frontal lobe, the seat of logic and reason, the forefront of the human brain, the height of evolution. Something incredibly strange happens almost immediately. Synapses fail and chemicals drop. Trust is established. Two friends awash in the glow of anticipated confession prepare for a testament to the fragility of human logic and morality and something else, probably. Something undefined.

It was something else most certainly and the girl in the first booth of the café told the other girl in the first booth of the café that she was in love. Real true burning love, like the kind that people pay ten dollars to see in movie theaters. The girl told the other girl that people don't live through this kind of love. They feel it and they eat it and they hold it and they sleep it. They stop thinking about anything else. They become an entirely different creature, as if the love itself had risen from the ashes of the Phoenix and burned parallel with a new fortitude and purpose.

The girl told the other girl about love. The waitress heard it all but didn't really care. An old man sitting at the bar with his daily crossword and egg sandwich laughed softly to himself and felt shame for hearing any of it at all. He thought about his wife and his children. He thought about how he used to return home after a long day at work to find that his home had never really been a home at all. He used to burn so brightly, night and day, from each steady breath to the next, and for every glorious second since the day they first met. She never could find that terrible little spot in her brain that would make her love him like he loved her. Synapses failed and chemicals dropped. She married him anyway.

The old man settled his bill and slipped out of the café, the same way he did at the same time every day.

The story is to be expected. Children arise with the dawning of a new day to find answers to questions they didn't know they were asking. Grown-up people operate with outdated infrastructure, looking for questions to fit the answers they didn't take the time to recycle. Knowledge and power, cyclical in nature, find their way back to the straight line as the masses scream about death and taxes, death and taxes, death and taxes. They never scream about love. They never tell the poor girl in the first booth of the café to just shut up already. They never tell the old man about the notion of eternity or literally anything that might restore his faith in something besides nothing.

Then, we all move collectivist while merging and defining absolute value and trying to refold that road map in a proper way. Trying to knot that bow tie before the wedding march begins to blare through the DJ's speakers. We draw lines in the sand and none of them are particularly interesting.

Girls Can Do Anything
by lin h. orndorf

Make your bed then catch the bus
Remember your lunch
An apple, Fritos, and fluffernutter on wheat
Behave at school, learn all you can
Use the key to turn the latch
Do your homework
Do your chores
Girls can do anything
You should be a nurse

Collect the trash and take it out
Sweep the kitchen
Sweep the porch
Empty and wipe the ashtrays clean
Dust the tables
Dust the knick-knacks on the bookshelf
Hoover the threadbare, green carpet with care
Girls can do anything
You should be a nurse

When the sun is shining, hang laundry out back
When rain is falling, hang it downstairs
Put the shirts on hangers and fold the rest
Bundle the newspapers
Smash the cans
Sort the colors of glass
Go to the scrapyard with Dad; make some cash
Girls can do anything
You should be a nurse

Don't climb the pine tree
Don't ride your bike in the street, after dark, or far
Don't play ball in the house
Don't leave your blocks, Legos, and tools lying about
Don't play with Barbies,
They'll make you hate yourself
Girls can do anything
You should be a nurse

Wash your hands
Brush your teeth
Wash your hands again or I'll scrub them with the brush
I'm leaving with or without you
I'm counting to three; I'm getting the wooden spoon
These are your grades? You can do better
Why don't you do better?
Girls can do anything
You should be a nurse

Eat your lima beans
Clean your plate
Children are starving in Armenia, in India, in Africa...
No dessert; you're fat
Stop sucking your thumb
Stop banging your head
Why do you do that?
Girls can do anything
You should be a nurse

Now your mother's in school
In four years, she'll be a nurse
Watch the news; learn about the world, the war, the moon...
She hates people who love; we won't buy the juice
We're fighting Commies; see the soldiers wrapped in flags
Get up early; watch Neil Armstrong take a stroll
Girls can do anything
You could be an astronaut

Listen to music
Read a book
Let's work on math
I'll check your spelling
We'll ride the bus to center city;
Come help me at the firehouse
No, girls can't be firemen – not yet
Girls can do anything
You could be a nurse, but you should be yourself

The Well-Intentioned Matchmaker
by jonathan ganong

Luella Devereaux Goldstein was like a weed - the kind that appears in your garden overnight but is too beautiful and unique to simply toss out. For her entire life Luella felt pulled by the whims of the wind. She possessed great capacity for love but understood that nothing was permanent. It was a simple fact in her mind yet caused destruction wherever she went. She had more money than she knew what to do with and rarely spent any. She had been married only once, but having no roots, she found that she couldn't stay any longer. In response, Mr. Goldstein hung himself.

In mourning, she left to go and live in a quiet English hamlet. She developed a special admiration for the stiff upper-lipped individuals whose natural inclination was to avoid speaking about feelings. "How can you collect yourself while talking about emotions all of the time?" she addressed. "It weighs you down and I've been here quite long enough." The wind rapped on her window once more and she answered. Luella packed her two suitcases tight, slipped on her most comfortable shoes, and put on her hat which was black, serious, and no-nonsense. She opened the door and said her silent goodbye to England and drifted into the winds waiting embrace.

The wind was the only element that cared for humanity much anymore, having a fondness of imagination and a proclivity for trying new things. The wind had always been kind to wanderers and found a companion in Luella – constantly leading her to new and, if anything else, interesting experiences. So as she listened to his soft whispers, Luella landed in a sleepy little town in which she met the funny little man named Bernard.

Bernard Livingston was a charming, middle-aged lump of a man. He came to a head shorter than the average woman, not that he minded, and his broad shoulders sloped which added to his overall oval-shaped body. Children couldn't help but wonder how well he rolled down large grassy hills. These thoughts weren't lost on Bernard but he was too easy going to care much about the innocent musings of youth. With no neck to speak of, his perfectly round head looked as though it would roll off at any moment. Sure-footed but pigeon-toed, he seemed to shuffle rather than walk. He had large brown eyes set too close together and a very large nose, which, in his defense, was well shaped. A wide smile with thin lips and fat cheeks finish off his peculiar looks and oh yes, he had very small ears. As he scuttled by, the townsfolk thought him some peculiar, flightless bird.

Despite his physical oddities, everyone was quite fond of Bernard. He had an active sex life but really didn't care much for the whole act. He had grown up with the monotonous droning of

his mother reminding him the value in keeping his hand in things so as not to get rusty. This wasn't what Mrs. Livingston had in mind, however. He lived on a routine but had a zest for life that attracted all sorts to him. He had accepted a long time ago that society is unintentionally drawn to positive people, unconsciously siphoning away what energy they could, whenever they could.

Bernard sauntered down the same route everyday. It began by descending his apartment building and going to the café down the road. There he ordered the same breakfast, a bacon and egg biscuit with good Chinese tea. The paper he picked up along the way at the news kiosk was read and he tipped his hat at Lolita, the owner, as he paid his bill. He stopped by Henrietta's stand everyday to pick up fresh flowers, having a penchant for peonies, and bought fresh produce on his way back home. Bernard was a welcome site along his worn-in path.

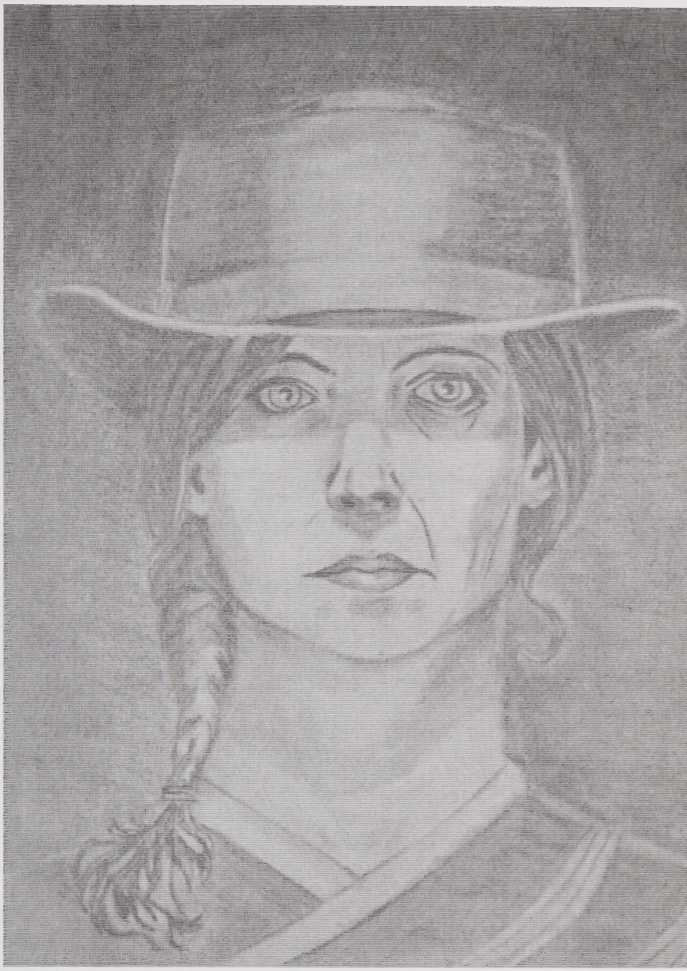
Bernard wrote from home and sold his stories to the local newspaper in the big town one over. He did well enough, even having sold a novel or two in his younger days—not too successful but not too shabby. His routine kept him from large or unnecessary expenses and he had amassed a sizeable nest egg in which to retire and write fiction full-time. He took exercise every night, often finding himself ambling along, admiring the lazy twinkle of the city reflected in the river beside him. He loved how the wind, his old friend, swirled around him and brought in the smell of the sea on his long coat-tails. This nightly ritual, rhythmic and measured like Bach, replenished him, and he gained energy for the following day.

Bernard loved to recite poetry for the wind. He imagined the wind taking the famous words by talented individuals and spreading them like invisible truths and anonymous gifts. In reality, the wind loved to do this very thing just like it had for Bernard his whole life. It crept up on unsuspecting persons who were ripe for inspiration – wind being the original muse.

Luella had a good nose and picked up the scent of cut grass, fresh bread, and rain before anyone else. She sniffed out desperation instantly and savored the gentle perfume of humility. She herself smelled of lemongrass and fine black tea. It was her olfactory prowess that first allowed her the sweet fragrance of something new and exotic. The wind helped in his own way as he brought in the bouquet. She followed its trail across the channel and into a sleepy little town like a hound-pup exploring the woods for the first time. She tried to make out the fragrant notes within the chord and managed to make out the delicate aroma of saffron and the sweet balm of contentment. It subtlety created a longing in her that she had long forgotten; and it was there along the river, mixed in with the smell of the sea, that she instantly fell in love with Bernard. Mr. Livingston was reciting poetry to the wind, and Luella stood there with her two suitcases, comfortable shoes, and serious hat, listening.

Their mutual friend knew good-timing and snatched the hat right off of Luella and let it tumble onto Bernard's feet. He picked up the black, no-nonsense hat and peered into the distance. It was dusk and the sun set a rosy tinge which shimmered up and over the riverbank. There Luella stood. She was tall and thin with sweet round shoulders and small breasts. She was rail thin and clothes fell on her like a hanger. She wore a purple vintage dress and a dark green cardigan. Her long wavy white hair, now free from the severe little chapeau, caught in the wind. Her blue eyes trapped the peach hue from the slowly descending sun, and her face was a pinched cherub grown to adulthood. Bernard walked over to her, a vein on his temple thrumming like a timpani. She beamed - her smile so radiant and genuine that Bernard put his hands in his pockets to hide them as they fidgeted. Her smile contained a lifetime of experience and hard love – sweet nectar to the artist within him. The wind drew them closer and closer until finally Bernard had to look up into her pale-blue eyes and saw the sun on his beloved river.

As they fell into each other, the wind swirled around them in hollow victory and left them as their worlds collided and stopped. Everything happened, and nothing happened. It was the star before being sucked into the gaping maw and the reason light can't survive a black hole. But the wind knew nothing of science, having only experienced poetry and the sweet nothings muttered in secret to none but him. Its sole desire was to search and strew things together, nothing more. The wind did not care that eventually the weed would always choke out the flower, as was their nature. Luella continued to travel the world, but had come to realize that her friend was naïve and cruel.



Disillusioned by heidi kouri

Swans Dove
by adam carnes

Act one way street.

Left horns thank you; honk then blink.

Shatter the glasses and plastics we pay for.

Snap the belt as it fastens.

My favorite songs are coming on then.

Twenty years ago it is number one it's a classic.

Rock, wrap, crash, and smashed thoughts,

Cashed and dastardly fantastic.

Act Two.

Cutaway the scenes to grin by extension of what's achieved.

Accomplices, cohorts, and promises.

The way clear spells it out.

Swans dove

Acted one-way street.

Left horns thanked you then blinked.

Shattered were the glasses and plastics we've paid for.

Snapped the belt as it fastened my favorite song came on the radio.

It was number one. I said,

"It's a classic."

Rocked and wrapped and crashed and smashed. I am number and said,

"I am cashed and dastardly fantastic."

Cutaway the scenes and grinned by extension of what was achieved.

Accomplices, cohorts, and promises.

The way cleared and spelled out.

Blacked out and knocked out,

T.K.O.

The full count.

Surmounts to stacking the odds.

Achievements took a back seat.

Believed in a world where we worked this all out casually, like usually; but casually.

Blind side to the musicality measuring us,

Refrainings the frantic rhythmic mimic of.

Frantics rhythmic mimic of.

Frantics' rhythmic mimic of.

Mimic of.

Blending with tempting me and emptying explained.

I said,

"I said".

Past presents interpreted pronouncing it either way.

Either way. Swans dove.

Swans. Dove.

Veritas
by aidan grennell

Our entire lives are built on the muddy quicksand of illustrious assumptions that bind us together in this invisible asylum. *Veritas,* we have written in the wrought-iron gates of our fantasy illusions, christening our lies as the absolute truth that fits like a ball gag, pressing back against our clenched teeth and muffling our unwitting screams as the world whips the mystery from our minds.

These are the impish thoughts flitting through my brain as I walk, placing each foot deliberately heel-to-toe. We believe, I think, in this mystical, magical force that binds us to the ground and the ground to the sun and the chair to the floor and so on. I wonder sometimes if we wrote it all down, wouldn't we then be considered just a little bit crazy? I believe in magic, like children, except my magic is quantifiable, so we call it science. Science, built upon evidence of things we can see, or claim to see, or believe that, if we make the microscopes strong enough, we will one day be able to see. But I have never seen an atom or smelled a quark; if I believe my empirical senses, then these things cannot be proven, so what does it matter if I say you're wrong or right or any of the blurring shades between? I believe in microscopic planets that whirl around their nucleic core; I believe we can break these down into smaller and smaller pieces that tend to exist, but just as easily could not. Our entire world is built on the mood of the quarks, on their tendency to exist, but we can't measure it or quantify it, so what does it matter if you call it gravity and I call it God?

These are the thoughts, hot and searing, that burn through the things I once believed I believed, those things which define and defy Aristotelian logic. We mold the context of our existence in peeling cinderblock walls; we stay inside the lines when we color pictures on the wall. Do we believe in free will? We argue for and we argue against; we say that sin is the evidence of free will and neurons are the evidence against, but we cannot justify why we act as we do. We slide through the slices of ourselves, define the area of our beliefs as a radius from the center. We integrate ad infinitum, until the difference is negligible and we ultimately converge into a single person with a tendency to exist.

These are the places I wander while he drones in absentminded monotone: I contemplate those moments when choice is muffled and your hardened skin pulls stardust to the surface of mine. It's crass to say sex, and it's not sex I am thinking of now anyway, but choice and dirtyfilthywords that have no language. Gravity pulls us in and pushes back with equal measure, so when we circle back and collide together, can we

blame gravity for the way we push and pull against each other? These minor adjustments in breathing hold the truth on the tip of my tongue and I choke on the beliefs I cannot release while he's speaking monochromatic words that I should recognize; but all I can see is light reflecting and refracting, sucked in by the white side of a black hole, held hostage by her gravity sucking the stars from the sky.

These are the thoughts that tend to exist, bursting in and out of the ways we define reality and complexity, practicality and abstraction. Language has become obsolete, so the words that do not exist live within a complex plane and we boil down love and sex and prayer to incomplete abstractions. It is like a star's birth, no; but a gentle yearning- these things and more, but what if the things that tend to make us most real are those things that tend not to exist? The black holes come from the loneliness, a star that pulled too hard without pushing back, holding tight to the glittering darkness and burying its light; we seek that which binds our souls together and unquestioningly step into the earth, believing we will never sink or fly.

To Remove Christmas
by jeff horner

Wait until it's sad
and weeping pine needles all over your hardwood floor,
hunched quietly in the corner like that, past resembling
what it first represented: the sadness of sadness past.
Strip it with anger
because anger is related – that cousin you want to ignore
who drinks your good rum, forgetting it's for the nog –
and you fight about money and markets and gun control,
and you jam ornaments into boxes to be stored for the
yawning year to come: the sadness of sadness future.
Drag it out
like a bounced drunk who's been making you sad or
mad all night the way a man killing himself with booze
will do, so you grab him by the scruff and the belt, and
never mind how he knocks over tchotchkes that represent
nothing as you force him, his limbs beseeching, out the
front door and around to the back of the house: where one
takes sadness.
Argue with your neighbors
in your head when you hear them putzing around their
backyard pruning bushes or shellacking furniture while
you hide a dead tree still covered in tinsel down the
yawning valley slope, because you missed the curbside
pickup date, so you prepare a response, something
charming, them leaning on their fence like a goddamn
rake, like the face of a rake is their goddamn face, so you'd
say "Ashes to ashes, right?": because death can be funny.
Trip over that rotted log
much farther down the slope than you needed to walk out
of paranoia, rakes lined up like a jury, and the tree, and
the drunk, and your cousin, breaks your fall as you spill
forward, hands forward, head forward, heels skyward, and
that heartbeat you fear you'll keep rolling, and you picture
how comical your feet must look like that, from the top of
the hill like that, sticking straight up in the air with the
rest of you hidden, like flappy loafer-ed ducks emerging:
because shadenfreude is perspective.
And consider
as you sit in the mud,
rest your arm on our tree.
And your ass getting wet.
And the scrapes up your side.
And the valley yawns west.
And your loafers stop flapping.
And you wear the quiet, and you represent nothing, and
you promise to visit.
Because it is a good spot: because it should be sad.

Crumpled Notes
by grey lajoie

"Oh, no! I'm late." Reginald fastened his "Dr. Shwish" tag to his white coat. "I'm heading off to work, honey." Helen stood at the foot of the steps, sighed and walked him into the kitchen to eat breakfast, one hand on his elbow and one around his side. Reginald looked at her, his gray face changing rapidly. From agitation, to confusion, to acceptance. His bare feet snapped from the cold linoleum with each step, as his white coat flickered against the backs of his pale legs. Reginald watched his feet carefully. They, being wrinkled, veiny, and gnarled, were often how he was reminded of his age. He sat down at the fine oak dining room table, which he'd helped Helen pick out so many years ago, and he gazed at the walls around him. "When did you paint the walls this yellow color?" he asked, insulted. The two stared at each other for a moment, both waiting. Reginald waiting for an explanation, and Helen waiting for him to admit that he remembered. Helen took a sip of coffee and then slowly explained that they had painted these walls together the year the kids had moved out. Reginald did not speak, but continued to stare at the walls.

Helen dressed her husband again that day, after feeding him, and the shadows that formed at her feet grew long and spilled into the walls. He sat on their bed, while she hoisted his pants above his knees. They were brown corduroy, and neither of them had ever liked the way the material sounded when he moved. Helen was unaware, but Reginald watched her working, had always watched her. Methodically clasping each button on his shirt, despite the way the buttons sunk deep into his belly, making it obvious to him that this shirt was not the right size, and why couldn't she see it?

"Why can't you see it?" he asked. But she did not respond, did not even look up to acknowledge him. He began to unbutton the shirt himself, but a tremor slowed him, and by the time he had undone a single button, his wife had already slipped both tube socks over his dangling legs. However Reginald's eyes had followed shadows to another subject, as they squinted and widened at the photos hanging on the walls. He stared deeply at a yellowing photo of Helen and him at a swimming hole, and furrowed his eyebrows. While he sat trying to piece together moments, his wife kneeled in front of him, double-knotting, grinning for a moment at the way his hair remained rumpled. Reginald's eyes dropped to watch the way her fingers conducted his laces. For a moment, he couldn't help but see piano keys when he looked at her fingers, but this thought quickly passed. He looked back to her head. "I hate her sometimes," he thought. And he did. He hated the way her knuckles were wider than the rest of her fingers, he hated the way her back humped behind her neck, he hated her knees, and the little hairs above her lip. He hated the way she walked. Oh, he *hated* the way she walked,

the way she always hurried as if she was on the clock, as if for someone else. He hated the way she dragged her sharp arms by her sides, which ended at the apexes of her egg shaped body. He hated the way she always looked so tired, as if he had failed to protect her, as if someone had managed to wear her down. He hated how she kept her hair cut, like a frame. Helen looked up at Reginald while finishing the second shoelace, and she smiled. Reginald flashed his teeth back at her. Helen supported herself using the bedframe and slowly rose to walk toward the door. Reginald glimpsed at her bare feet. Those feet were magnificent, they were so shapely, had retained their youth so well. Such perfect circles each of her toes formed. He watched her glossy heels bounce away, and he was brought back to the way her little toes would wiggle during sex. Reginald had always loved Helen's feet. He smiled. Because meals were often the only events which held his attention, Reginald had now relocated seats again, back to the worn oak table.

"When did you paint the walls this yellow color?" he asked, taking his seat. His wife didn't look up when he took his place across the table from her. Lunch was already sitting in front of him. Soup. Cold soup. She should have known, after so many years, how he hated her minestrone soup. The placemat was empty in front of her. Why didn't she have to eat it? He watched the soup carefully, his nose tilted up and away from it. The soup simply sat there, motionless. Was it staring back at him? He couldn't tell. He decided it would be best to quietly eat the soup so that she wouldn't take away his television remote again.

His spoon pierced the layer of film on its surface.

"Did Nick call yesterday?"

The chunks of potato haunted him. Always stiff and undercooked.

"Reginald?"

So slick and slimy, wading through the murky red broth.

"Reginald..."

And the way the olive oil separated and rested at the surface.

"Did your son call?"

The confrontation of smooth and thick, together with the subtle taste of dish soap on the sides of the unrinsed bowl.

"Reginald!"

"This is very good soup, dear."

And it was.

As was tradition, Nick arrived late, luggage in hand as he wrapped an arm around his father. Although smiling, he surveyed his father's eyes carefully. Reginald watched him with a troubled look. He examined the way his son's skin had begun to wilt, under his eyes, at the corners of his chin. The way folds had worked themselves into certain places, on the forehead, between the eyebrows, and left a permanent expression of worry.

"You look tired," his father said to him. But Nick only smiled a sad smile and walked by him, allowing a second person to enter, a curly little blonde girl. She said nothing, and never looked at Reginald, but hugged him with a full affection. Her skin was soft and when it made contact, gave a certain warmth reminiscent of Reginald's youth.

Everyone was gathered around the oak table, some with mugs tucked into their palms. They sat discussing wedding plans, medical bills, the housing market. Reginald would listen in fragments, but more often simply stared at the walls.

"Why are our walls yellow?"

He looked back at Helen, and then Nick, neither of which reacted as if he'd spoken at all. And then, glancing at the little girl, noticed she was staring at him. Her expression felt familiar. He knew her.

"Who are you?"

Her mouth curled slowly to form a smile, and glancing at Nick just before speaking, she said with suddenly inspired eyes, "Can you tell me again about how you and, um, Helen fell in love?"

Reginald's face brightened. He took a moment to relish, to grin, to look around the table at the faces now watching him. And then a gravity fell over his face. He sat for a moment, staring into nothing.

"We were so small..." he began. "How old were you?" she asked, leaning forward. "Oh, we were in our twenties, but I mean small when I say small. We could fit in a pocket."

She looked over to Nick with uncertainty, who closed his eyes, smiled and shook his head. "Yes, we could fit into the pockets of men, but we spent most of our time in a grand piano. Now I know it sounds like we would have been agitated quickly, but the truth is, the vibrations helped us sleep at night. Besides, we were young then. We were dancers. We bounced on spring steel wires right alongside the little white hammers made of silk and hair. We let the warm notes kick off of old maple walls and shiver our bones. We would get visitors coming to play all the time. Sometimes sad players would come and the rain would fall and we would cry. Sometimes they would play angry, and the broadest wires would moan. And sometimes they would play us to sleep. We slept on the felt head of C sharp, not because we liked the way it sounded, but because that key always stuck on the old musical machine. When we were really young, sometimes

I would lie to her about the time when she woke in the morning, to give myself a little more time next to her. I would watch the way light laid on her cheeks, the way her hair fell, I would see her chest rise and fall. It's hard to see any of it now. The funny thing about living inside of a grand piano is, it's usually dark. I mean as dark as ink. Our other senses would take over. We would rely on the music to determine how to feel, and we would rely on our hands to determine what to feel. I can still feel the skin on the small of her back with my fingertips, and I can still smell her hair, it always smelled like the beach. There's something to be said about the dark. Everything feels brighter...I remember a Luddy Beethoven with wild hair. Odd man. Sad. He played beautifully because of it. I remember our bare feet dancing on the same blacks and whites that his fingers slid across."

"That's enough Reginald..." Helen whispered.

"Do you remember the dip we took in Beethoven's soup bowl, Helen?

"Stop it..." she breathed.

"Do you remember lying in the sands of his salt shaker, barefoot and waiting?"

"Stop it!"

Reginald, having been staring through the oak table since he began talking, looked up for the first time at Helen, whose freckled, antique cheeks were damp with tears. She stood up and rushed out of the room, her feet clicking with each step. Closed-toe heels. Reginald hated them. As she exited, her rapid ticking was replaced by the slower tick of the clock on the wall, which seemed to intensify with each second, almost glaring at Reginald from its lookout on the pale yellow wall, although he could not, despite all his focus, absorb what it said.

Sometimes Reginald felt like he was in a dream. Unsure of how or why he was where he was, missing certain colors and details around himself. Sometimes unable to hear or speak, as if he were under water. Or as if he had just woken up and the lights were too bright for him to see. It didn't feel like his own dream, though. He felt as though he was ghost, haunting the dreams of his loved ones as a fragmented memory, a broken reminder. He thought about this as he watched his son reprimanding the little girl for encouraging him. He could hear them speaking, but it was as if he was on the other side of a tunnel. Nick was talking about how he hadn't seen his parents in over a year, and how his mother was so excited about his visit. He hated his father for this, for being this way.

Reginald began to mumble, "Yes, we were small once, ready to consume life, to take it all in. But life weighs you down. We've gotten too big to move. We are the mountains who sleep on our sides. We stay wrapped in a blanket of sky. We are ancients. Now, we are the giants who shake salt and touch keys. But we

have nothing else to do but reminisce and apologize to no one. It's funny, no matter how much waiting you do, the end always seems sudden."

Reginald looked from Nick to the little girl and back to Nick."Who are you? What are you doing here? Why are my walls yellow?"

The little girl was smiling at him, had never stopped smiling. Her legs kicked back and forth below her.

"Daddy says I might get a little brother," she said suddenly.

Reginald's eyelids relaxed and he smiled back at the girl.

"You know, I had a child once."

Nick stood up quickly and walked in the same direction as his mother. Reginald, puzzled by the abrupt response, looked up and watched him leave.

"Could you tell me about him?" the girl asked.

Reginald smiled again, this time with a serene warmth that looked like stepping into a bath.

"I remember swimming in soup..."

His words stopped. He continued to stare forward, but his smile had been lured into a look of wonder. His mouth sat slightly open and his eyes glazed. He was interrupted by music, the sound of a piano coming from the basement.

"She's playing!" said the little girl.

"Chopin's 4th prelude," he said, but it was too quiet for her to hear.

The little girl continued to speak, but Reginald no longer heard her. He only sat as still as he could, and waited to hear the sharp C stick.

Winter Cotton
by mallory chambliss

Time past, the chisel to memory, recalls but a ripple of its former clarity—a pause in a cotton field.

Sopping wet ground from overnight rain set against a rose-colored sky, where low clouds light on the horizon in dull winter glow.

Cotton tufts left to shake on stalk in the brash winter wind of a Georgian field;
White, forgotten boll, too un-green, to be of any earthly plant;
Brown husks of summer past, wildly nodding rattles;

Romantic imagining, that is just that—a silhouetted, fat farmer tilling the dark Georgian soil in some flat valley.
No weeds, just man's fashioning of airy rows between sharp lines of dried cotton plants, equidistant, amid the rich, dark soil;
Miles of tilled soil stretching like this, as if it were earth's last feature;
As if, walked into, the expanse quick transforms to an enveloping habitat to world's end.

Black crows, convening kings of this domain, chatter over a dead rat, in an intelligent cacophony of primate-like yaups;
Shuffling field mice, making, heard not seen, the earth seem to vibrate and shiver.

Soups of commingling nitrates, phosphates, algae, and bacteria stagnate in the hazy light of low-laid pools;
Rain-torn, wind-stretched, and splayed, pure white strands of cotton, smudged there by mud, appear more as sloppy trash than nature's fiber on bare ground;
Shredded black tire, exposed here and there, by the plow's soft action;
Peppered, white and colored plastic bits, blown or dragged, artifacts of a once useful means.

Unclear this memory—no year to mark its birth, no extraordinary event to exclaim its being;
Served up, a mystical offering, as the mind's fog bank shifts to allow fleeting objects to form and fade.

Finding Time by amanda watkins

Cleared Away
by forest beaudet

From the first whiff of
Fall I was found,
Taken.
This catharsis in cafes with coffee and
Chocolate christening the way to
Gaudy romance,
But it's not like that at all.
This is quiet, even when we're not.
Long hours laid lengthwise against
You and I, speaking, and
Not speaking. So that on the
Solstice of autumn I was
Swept off and away and all the
Dirt was put in a dump far away from us and
Burned and you were the broom.
Yes, there is coffee and chocolate, both
Mixed up and not mixed malapropisms
To set us both straight,
But it is not garish.
Our profligacy is perfect in its
Imperfection, like your hair or the
Way you get angry when I speak about the
Past too much.
Let's not worry about that then and
Take for us what took too long to give to anyone else.
We're not robotic, nor parenthetical, nor clockwork
Like the orange of our first few campfires,
But human.

Sound
by jacob wishon

It. Decorates facades with a deep red.
It's splash.
Wet.
Reverbs through the night.
Her. Ivory agape below wide open souls.
Her shriek.
Like a dying banshee.
Penetrates through the night.
He. With digits outstretched in a feeble attempt.
His wail.
Clenched and herculean.
Pushes through the night.
Metal. Still in grasp and now uncocked.
It's blast.
A concussive force.
Permeates through the night.
Him.
All is dark.
All is gone.
All is done.

Through the night all is silent.

Day of Chicken Pox
by erica halliman

I am three in the photograph.
My sister and I sit
outside our house in Florida on the canal.
We wear bright blue plaid shorts and eyelet ruffles
my mother sews for us. Red itchy spots cover our young skin
from head to toe. I am jubilant.
She is home from school for fear to spread the pox.
I play with her all day.
My mother wraps our small fingers in oven mitts.

She shares her room with me
and her trundle bed. She takes the top bunk and I the bottom.
When I am sick she stays up with me.
We break the rules, together.
I get back my partner of the ninja trail.
Down by the alligators, march along murky waters
where small pets disappear.
It is dark and clammy under sea grape leaves,
my sister is with me.

Cloth imprisons my hands
she scratches spots that irritate my skin.
School is back in session
I crane my neck to look out the window,
pale blue sky, dull shades of green grass,
a distant solitary sun.

Is a Dog
by taylor phillips

It was raining. I always take the road that follows the river. There's no traffic out there at night. The tarmac is worn, patched and potholed. No one lives out by the river. There are no streetlights or reflectors on the road. Between the road and the river is a wall of high red oaks and bare maples and dogwoods. The oaks won't lose their leaves yet. They linger on the branches until spring when the new buds push them off. The river is white through the trees where the rapids' crests and the moonlight meets. The other side of the road is a blue-collar sprawl of warehouses, tranny and brake repair, sawmills, machine shops, vacant industrial space with plywood windows, abandoned leftovers from the turn of the last century. There was a dog in the road, muscular and well fed. It stood with its shoulders broad in the pride of youth. Its hair was trimmed close and golden brown on its back. The striations of its muscle shaded black in my headlights. The white chest held a defiant inhale. We made eye contact. The dog's ears lowered. I swerve, the brakes lock, the rear wheels skid sideways and I can hear water displacing as I close my eyes and if I grip any tighter, I will tear the steering wheel from the column. A dull thud reverberates as the first wheel goes over and then the second; there's no more control, all sound and light ceases at impact. I inhale gas and rubber and a warm, fresh smell. The car is still. I open my eyes. A fence post is buried in the radiator. I got out of the car and examined the dog. Its chest was torn and a sharp white rib twisted out. It pointed at me. The blood was black on the pavement, mixed with with fur and streaks of gasoline refracting a vivid spectrum in the moonlight. The dog was breathing. The dog was choking and coughing and spitting. We made eye contact. I took off my jacket and tied it around the rupture. I sat down in the blood and fur and gasoline. I held the jacket to the wound with gentle pressure. I don't know why. The bleeding would not let up. I knew that. I put my palm on the dog's head and stroked down its neck. The dog's eyes are black and wet and bloodshot, full of every desirable human trait. There is ink in the pupils, creation and curiosity in dark places where light doesn't touch. There is love. The dog loves me even as it bleeds and sputters. The dog licks my hand slowly.

Anthem of Suburbia
by hannah covington

Suburbia is choking on brand names, great blue

letters staring absurdly outwards through a haze of hot wind, blowing like smoke

through the city. The people walk about wearing masks, filmy, oily rain

drops bouncing and sizzling off the hard plastic of their faces, and every last memory

is stamped into the asphalt, and lost, at the mercy of a thousand tires of a thousand cars.

There is an infinite peace in suburbia, even while its people rush about blindly, crowing like chickens.

And, nestled deep in soft cocoon homes of warm brown chicken

feathers, the blind sheep live, showing pride in their sameness. Aquamarine blue

skies, the vast ocean outside their windows, are blocked as the shades are drawn. Cars,

murmuring angrily as they snake through endless asphalt jungles, are bitter as they cough up smoke.

Hungry human mouths cry out for food – not for the food of knowledge, not for any sacred memory,

but for the next serving of blissful lies, eyes deep and blank like empty grey windows reflecting the rain.

The only unpolluted thing, it seems, is the cleanness of the rain.

Wal-Mart, Blockbuster, BI-LO, AT&T. CVS, Wendy's, Facebook, MTV. Kentucky Fried Chicken,

X-Box, Nintendo, YouTube, McDonald's. Why do I write poetry? Memories

tainted, free thought subdued. Thinking, learning, working, living inside different sized boxes, rigid blue

walls, sickly sterile. Eyes slowly going vacant, faces expressionless, bleary-eyed and choking on smoke.

Red cars, black cars, small cars, big cars, fancy cars. Everyone wants a brand new, shiny new car.

How peaceful it would be, surely, to be the only one on Earth. Wandering through junkyards of cars

abandoned in the streets, while the towers burned, and the factories fell, and the rain

ate away at everything, hungry. Peaceful, to have grownup as a child, walking alone across smoke

colored glass and dust on the ground, smashed from windows with curtains unfurled. Skin like chicken

scales, hands worn, lips dry. Nothing to do but to walk forever, through the empty Earth, navy blue

skies, beautiful, glittering, vast, and free. Nothing to live for, nothing to lose, and your only memories

are ones that you have made for yourself. And the ancient, trembling Earth has memories

of its own, lost and forgotten, that it holds within itself as it sits silently, brooding. Your body, like a car,

travels faithfully on, carries the temple of your mind. The woods are thick and the fields are long, blue,

cold, crying lakes sink deep into the ground or trickle to the oceans that fill with rain. Like a chicken's

caramel eye, hot coals of meteors plunge through the sky, colored like autumn leaves but leaving smoke

long after the fire is gone. Holding stiff hands over flames in the dark, smoke

curls up through your fingers. And the only thing left is a memory

of something far from suburbia. Broken shards of sea glass, in a jar. A dream catcher, with chickens'

tail feathers dangling. An old teddy bear, eye missing, fur torn. Cigarettes, dried roses, rusted car

keys, a million pine trees. Worn out shoes, lemon drops, old leather, goldfish in a bathtub of rain

water, dusty, yellowed books. An ankle bracelet that pinches your skin, the color of robin's egg blue.

What would those nervous chickens of suburbia be, without their large houses and gleaming cars,

with the smoke lifted from their eyes? Unable to hide again from their memories,

would they drown in the torrents of the Earth's rain and in those oceans of deepest blue?

From Isolation to Communication
by kadie sanders

Paper Camera

by grey lajoie

My mom, the housewife once, always kept a camera nearby.

I remember cutting out of paper, a small camera

so that I could snap her back.

I can't see this photo being taken. I don't remember the moment;

my father hoisting me onto his colossal shoulders, managing to keep a cigarette in hand.

Maybe on his way to work, or just returning.

I don't remember my mom, standing with her camera.

I can't see her taking a photo at all, the way one eye might squint shut

or the way her silky black hair might fall when her head tilts for the shot.

I can't remember this photo being taken.

But I remember the way that cigarette smelled.

I remember being tickled by his beard.

I remember a tape measure, a black briefcase,

that flat pencil behind his ear.

I remember those sky-blue, brick walls,

and the garden they surrounded.

A little white picket fence stood in front of that yard,

and the crime rate placed bars on our windows.

I can still see plants grow from

bathtubs and birdbaths and holes in the walls,

and me,

navigating an uneven brick path.

I remember red garden chairs.

He, the mystery, sitting in the sunlight of that sanctuary.

Slumped over,

Legs open, arms resting on legs,

hands and head falling limp.

He would sit out there until my bedtime

I can still see, with wide eyes, through the foggy glass,

the little orange glow, flitting through the dark.

Ode to Autumn
by Tequila Petty

A single leaf strokes the ground;
the Earth shivers rightfully at its touch.
Like a gentle peck upon
one's lips, it doesn't ask for much.

Dawn breaks, the wind chants prose,
leaves fall one by one.
Rust kissed colors circle my head
as they impersonate the sun.

Autumn's sweet fragrance satisfies my nose:
a craving a bee would comprehend.
It attracts me, like honey dripping
from the palm of nature's hand.

A wonderland of warmth
shades in a new perception all around.
Harvest gold beginnings,
and crimson magic.
A fresh trail I have found.

The last leaf descends,
a pariah
traveling alone.

With one last glance I
stare at the tree with
brazen,
brittle bones.

Fate's Bayou
by clint hunnicutt

His feet trudged through the thickness that seemed more like tar than mud, as the rain poured around him. His orange jumpsuit was saturated to the point where he thought the stitching might come undone and force him to run through the rest of the swamp naked. The blackness of the night, along with the hammering rain, made everything past five feet ahead of him nearly impossible to see. Flashes of the lightning bolts battling each other in the sky like old foes lit up the muck around him, just enough so he could guess where the trees and their roots were. "Keep going, don't stop now," he muttered to himself as he hurriedly trekked his way along. "You have to get away..."

He knew that the swamp was a cruel thing to have to run through in the middle of the night, let alone with the storm of the century ravaging it. A veil of rippling water which blanketed the floor of the swamp masked the uneven landscape just below the surface, and he was very conscious of the fact that his chase would be cut short with a wretched ankle. The mud he was attempting to run through grabbed his ankles with every step, and like a child who is seeing a parent for the last time, refuses to let go. Dark, twisted figures of trees filled his vision, with their branches extending outward like claws eager to slit his throat. A bright flash of lightning above illuminated the swamp once more, followed by a deafening crash.

At the sound he instinctively threw his back to the closest tree as another lightning bolt flashed across the sky, and thoughts of panic flashed through his mind. His first instinct was that the sheriffs following him had finally caught up, and fired a round of buckshot. More rain fell down across his face, streaking watery paths down his cheeks and scraggly beard. He peeked out around the edge of the tree, peering behind him. In the darkness, he could make out the long, thick shape of a tree that once stood tall, but now lay on its side in the marsh like a sinking ship. He let out a slight sigh of relief, and his erratic heartbeat had begun to subside, until another bolt lit up the outlines of the sheriffs a hundred yards behind him.

"Son of a bitch!" he yelled through gritted teeth as he once again took off running. The lightning allowed him to see the ten policemen chasing after him. It allowed him to see their bloodhounds, who had somehow managed to keep his scent even through the storm.

He ran through the swamp, through the endless abyss of the swamp, impending death following him in the shape of the law. *Is this my punishment?* He asked himself as he stumbled over an unseen root just below the waterline. *It can't end this way, it just can't! It's not right damn it!* He tried to regain his balance, but the ground below his feet made that impossible and he fell on his face. During the fall, the memory of his crimes shot through his mind like a rotating bullet.

The robbery turned sour quickly, all because of the greed of his so-called partners. The three of them were only supposed to grab the money in the vault and get out of the bank within two minutes; however, the others started grabbing money out of the tellers' registers. He remembered how the plan went to shit after one of the security guards at the bank became feisty and went for a hidden sidearm tucked into his sock. He was forced into shooting the guard; it had to be done. On top of all that, two cops were having coffee in a small diner just down the street from the bank, and upon hearing the gunshot go off they called in backup. What was supposed to be a quick and clean operation with a hefty payoff, turned into a thirty-hour standoff that ended with a dead security guard, a partner killed by police, one on the run, and *he* serving multiple life sentences.

The grimy, gritty taste of the mud filled his mouth as the substance slid its way in between the cracks in his teeth; his nostrils stung as the thick mud caked itself along the walls of his nostrils. Spitting out as much of the grime as he could, and sneezing out the rest, he got to his feet as quickly as he could. The mush beneath him slid as he pushed himself up, giving him a second dose of the swamp's murky floor. As he once again pushed himself up and through the rain, lightning, and thunder, he could hear the one sound that concerned him the most: dogs barking, and men shouting. As he rose to his feet he told himself, *No, this is my redemption. I will escape what I've done.*

The swamp grew denser with every step, as with each step he grew wearier. He knew his body was failing him, but he wasn't willing to accept it. Breathing heavily, he fought his way through underbrush full of thorns and sharp branches. He felt the skin on his arms and legs tear open as he fought his way through, thrashing about like a wild man. "No!" he screamed out, as more of his clothing and skin tore open, "It isn't fair, I deserve to be free!"

He glanced behind him as he continued to fight his way through the thorns, and he could see the officers closing in on them. He could see them moving closer to him at a steady pace, one much faster than his, and he could see their rifles gleaming

in the darkness. Each one approaching him had their face masked by the night, as an executioner's face is hidden by a hood. They moved to him like the grim reaper after a soul, and he could sense that fate was catching up to him.

"No, no, NO!" He shoved himself through the brush with all his might, succeeding in getting through, but at the same time he'd cleared a path for his pursuers to march right to him with relative ease. The trees were much larger now and packed in tighter than before. He tried navigating his way through, his body bleeding profusely from innumerable wounds. The barking of the dogs behind him suddenly became louder than the rain, and the men's shouts louder than the thunder. He had to escape; he knew he could get away. If only he could just run a little farther...

"Raise your hands above your head or we will fire!"

He felt as if Death had placed a firm hand on his shoulder, as if to say that there was no other option left for him. Madness crept its way into his mind, as he continued to believe that his refuge was just beyond the trees ahead of him. Another shout filled his ears, but this was not another warning. It was just a simple command. "Open fire!"

Weather Conditions
by lin h. orndorf

when i'm under trees
i speak the language of leaves
when i'm in the sand
i speak the tongue of land

doctors umbrella ribs
holding red hot tongs
mouse crucified with rose stems
left to dry outside

menstruating cow
creeping kudzu
grows more brown
faithful hound
has no use for a bone
it splinters in his mouth
won't leave him alone

memories of those forgotten
fly by nights
what is flesh and blood
remains flesh and blood
nothing more than what
you can see smell taste touch
the flesh don't ask for much
just to be inhabited
to stand like a wilted flower
let the mouth devour
electric odors disposable desires

thirsty sentinels drink up
the pulp of faded fire
a bazaar of flesh
pilfering change
from the earth's purse
trying to get into
the panties of this universe
it's voice cast a spell
it's breath was a curse
i blow into my fist
to see who dies first

Traffic jam
On the roadside
A flock of turkeys

---

loose snow swept away
white footprints revealed
by the wet broom.

excerpt from Sweet's Pond
by beverly williamson

December 1988

Brite pulls off his shades when he gets to the door of the café. He saw the sun come up – 7:28 according to the clock on the old stove – and knew the bright light would sear into his sandpapered eyeballs. He had walked slowly, knit cap pulled down against the cold, shoulders hunched close to his ears, and sheep skin-lined jacket buttoned up to his chin, imagining himself turning back to get in the truck and drive out of town. Drive east into the sunrise. Drive that truck into the sea. And swim. And swim until he was numb. And then let go.

Let it all go... right out of my head.

He just left, they'd say. He never was much. He just never showed up one morning.

He had woken up at about four this morning, and hadn't been able to get back to sleep. The dream was filled with vague shapes, twisting and melding scenes. First he was falling. Then tied down or no ... held down. Forced. Pushed.

Now as he slides on to a green plastic covered stool, Brite is disappointed that he's not hell and gone.

Roberta pulls the coffee pot from the burner with one hand and reaches for a cup and saucer with the other. She eyes Brite as she pours, leaving exactly one quarter inch of space between the dark coffee and the white rim of the cup.

Still holding the pot, she says, "You look awful."

"Thanks," answers Brite and adds a teaspoon of sugar without returning her stare. Instead he sips and then looks left and right. There is one elderly couple in a booth and two men at a table near the door. Brite doesn't recognize any of them, although the two men had nodded to him when he came in. "Where is everybody?"

"Christmas in three days. Most of these old folks already gone to their children's. Everybody done and off work'll be in later. You sick?"

"In a matter of speaking," says Brite. "Will you top this up?"

"You gonna eat?"

"Probably not." He concentrates on the coffee pot as Roberta pours.

"What you doing for Christmas?" she asks leaning on the counter, settling in.

Brite adds another half a teaspoon. "Sleeping, I hope."

"Oh, so that's what's wrong with you. Now I know a cure for that," says Roberta as she smiles and leans a little closer.

Brite notices an oval shaped burn mark on her wrist, a white smudge of flour on her shoulder, and the glitter of a gold hoop in her ear before he meets her eyes. He feels the muscles in his face relax as he lifts his eyebrows to let her know he's ready to hear the cure.

"Sex," she whispers.

Brite smiles, lifts the cup, and says just before drinking, "Is that right?"

"Sure is."

"I appreciate the advice."

"You welcome, and you know what else is good to help you sleep?" asks Roberta as she straightens and pulls an order pad and pen from her apron pocket.

"I'm listening," says Brite.

Roberta punctuates the air with her index finger pointed toward the door. "You fill up that empty house over there, the one you knocking up against yourself in, with a bunch a' children you got to run around after all day, and you sleep like a stump at night."

Brite looks back to his coffee. Swallows. Feels his face tighten. The momentary lightness turned to darkness.

Roberta scratches across the order pad. "I'm going order you a ham biscuit. You can take it with you." She yanks off the light green-lined page and places it on the ledge of the open window through which a wide wedge of kitchen can be seen. "Lamott!" A beefy black hand scoops up the paper.

Roberta turns back to Brite as he drains his cup. "You want some more?"

"No thanks. I need to get to the garage." Brite reaches back for his wallet.

"You gonna stay all day by yourself again like you did last year? Got another room needs painting?" asks Roberta with an eyebrow arched in disapproval.

Brite stops with his right hand on his wallet and his left elbow on the gold-flecked counter. "How do you know what I did last year?"

"No secrets in this town. You know that," says Roberta and turns to get the biscuit that has just appeared in the window behind her.

Brite watches her back as she lifts the wax paper from the basket and swaddles the biscuit in it like a tight blanket. When she turns to him, he looks down as he completes pulling his wallet from his back pocket.

"Ain't you having Christmas with Jenna Lee and Tucker?" The cash register dings as Roberta hits the keys.

Brite is in no mood to say what he knows she wants to hear. He tells the truth. "No."

"Why not? You ain't waiting for her to ask, are you? Ya'll family. You don't have to wait to be asked."

"I'm not waiting. How much?"

"Three seventy-five. Here's your biscuit. Then why not?"

"I don't want to. Keep the change."

Roberta digs a one and a quarter out of the cash register and holds the bill and the coin in her hand over the counter. She jabs her fist once at Brite and jerks her head toward her fist. "Keep your change."

Brite rolls his eyes and takes the change. "Thanks. I'll see you."

As he turns to go, Roberta says, "Come have Christmas dinner with us."

Brite turns back to the counter to see Roberta wiping the counter in earnest though there's nothing to wipe. After four definitive strokes back and forth, she stops and puts both hands on the counter. "Well?"

"Roberta, Lamott don't want to see my white ass at his Christmas dinner."

Roberta's eyes immediately twinkle. Then she laughs, her head thrown back, and her eyes closed. Brite laughs too.

"Lamott ain't gonna see nobody white or black. He gonna be concentrating on his plate. Besides Lamott Junior is coming home from college this afternoon. Ya'll can talk football. Mama and Daddy will be there too. You know how Miss Dolly love to worry over skinny people. It'd give Daddy a rest."

Brite moves away from the door as a woman holding a baby, a man, and a little boy in red overalls come in. "Good Morning, Roberta," the man calls.

Roberta returns his greeting and urges them to take a seat anywhere.

Brite catches the door and slips out before she can say anything else.

He looks both ways before walking across the road.

Nothing coming.

Nothing coming but another stupid Christmas to figure out what to do with himself.

As he walks across the road and toward the garage, Brite thinks about Roberta's offer and smiles. It's funny, but she meant it. He knows she did, and that thought makes him feel good and empty at the same time. And that makes the smile fade as he unlocks the door.

Jenna Lee's got a doctor's appointment. She won't be in until noon. For a moment he stands in the emptiness and thinks about leaving the *CLOSED* sign in the window, stepping back out to lock the door and walking home to go back to bed. But the light is blinking on the answering machine, and Jenna Lee would be at his back door as soon as she came in any way.

Brite ignores the blinking light, flips switches, turns up the heat, then unlocks the door to the bay, feeling black with dread at the simple, mindless, meaningless tasks ahead of him – tasks

that make no contribution whatsoever to anything noteworthy. A Camaro needs a tune up and tires rotated. Maybe new fan belts. Cobb Wilson's bringing his Lincoln in for a new battery. Thurmond Hunt is coming in to talk about the Mustang Tucker found for his son, Martin. It's parked at the back of the bay. Brite walks back to the car. He stands facing the blue hood and staring through the window at the black bucket seats and the chrome gear shift. But he sees the flashing pictures from last night's dreams – falling struggling. He hears the familiar soundtrack – crying, screaming.

Brite reaches for the keys in his back pocket with the intention of really locking up.

Fuck it.

He holds the keys tightly against his palm as he pivots quickly on his right heel, turning toward the front of the garage.

"Morning Brite. You open yet? The wife's dropping me off. Can I leave the Lincoln with you now?"

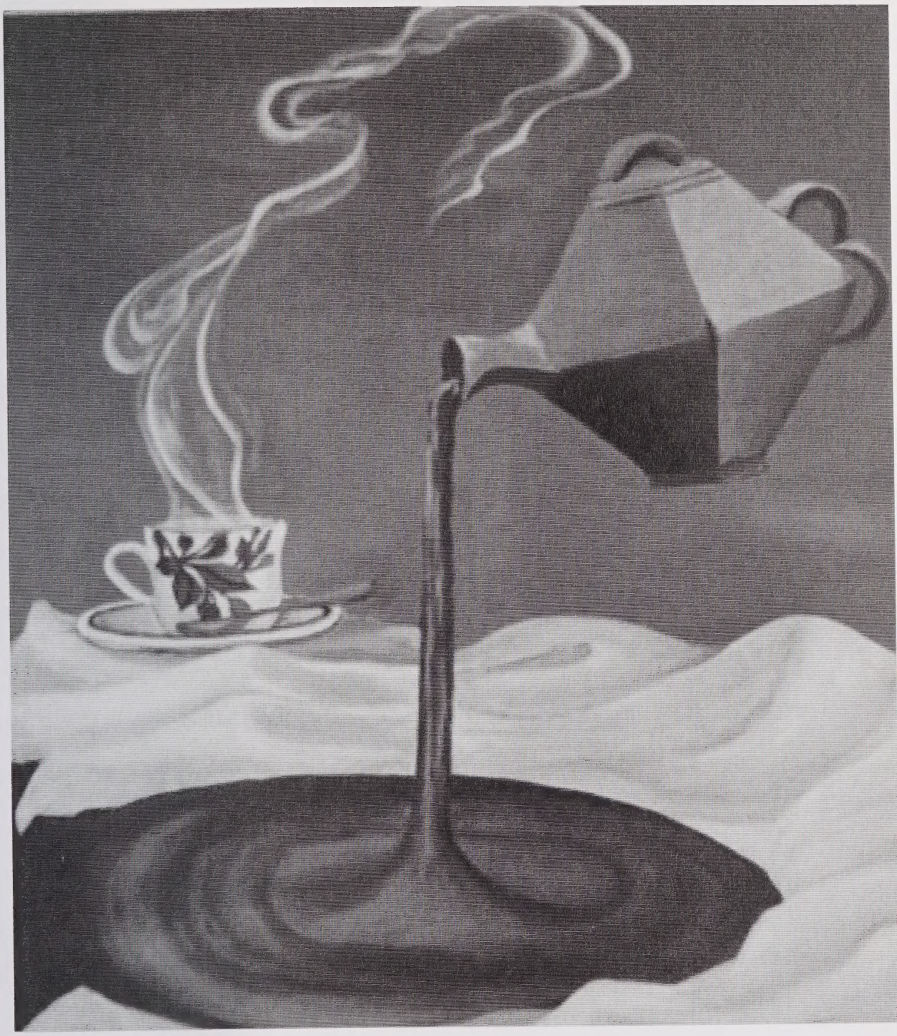
Brite watches Cobb as he approaches having come barreling through the door from the customer area just as Brite was turning to leave. Cobb's liver-spotted hand holds out a set of keys. Brite watches them turn on the key chain that hangs from a bronze oval of metal with *Lincoln* embossed in the middle. He does his best to meet the old man's eyes, and says, "That'll be fine. Pick it up this afternoon."

"See you later," Cobb yells as he turns to leave and gives a wave as he passes through the door.

Brite makes coffee even though he doesn't need any more. His hands are starting to shake but it's something to do other than pop the hood of Cobb's Lincoln and face the future. He sits on the wooden stool behind the cash register and unwraps the ham biscuit. It's good, and he wishes he had another one. He thinks about Roberta again.

"No secrets in this town."

But there are secrets.



The Friend, Pouring
by kelly wheeler

Waiting for the Sky to Fall

anonymous

an arm twisted, angling towards the sky...

just breathe...

a face pushed against the blue wall...

flesh made red against my palm

breathe...

seeing stars

blurring breath

i am falling

the sky opens, angels and demons, warriors and watchers

tangling twisting fighting embracing

drowning in sweat

engaging in battle at the edge of sight

while eyes are closed

I see

words mingle, parting to tongue running with spit on sweat in hair over blood into...

silence

I take your hand into mine

light the candle

find salvation in the lost parts of the deepest places locked

green drips run hot, from arm to chest, wrist, neck, finger, rib, palm, shoulder, spine, face

soldering together with long green lines, becoming red

gray cold steel scrapping, teasing, scratching, cutting

breath quickens

the knife into wet flesh, hear the sound breaking through, crimson drops of life emerging from torn skin.

fingertips, tongues, lips, teeth, thumbs... frantic in search... lost in liquid, smell, sound, sweat, shit, tears, come, guilt, desire, shadows battling on black sky, silence mounting, hope dying, birthing dreams, pulling, scratching, shaking,

waiting waiting

quickly pulling... holding with tense muscles...

in the distance, a rumble

a blast goes off , thrusting us apart, back into ourselves

screaming, shivering, soaking... newly born

the blue walls fade away

leaving just the sent, lingering in breath

i find myself standing in the cloudy fog that always lingers after fireworks

American Muscle
by leisa payne

The dark clouds hung low across the sky. Grumblings of thunder rolled away like an electric vibration causing the hairs on her arms to tickle. On this side just before the bridge, there was a pull off that dropped down from the pavement and its clearly painted white line. As she stepped down onto the loose, rutted gravel looking carefully for the trail that went down to the river, the rain began to fall in a slow, fine mist. Slowed down by thick briars on her left and a littering of trash from the accident that she stopped to pick up and stuff in the pockets of her jacket she carefully made her way down the steep incline.

Cautiously moving around on the bank to get comfortable, feeling the soft ground give way under the weight of her feet as if it had grown tired from carrying her heavy heart. Distracted by a huge colony of dainty, yellow flowers stretching out from the river's edge all the way up the slope. The buzzing chatter of bees was the only sound that echoed off the water from the river below. Freshly disturbed pungent, dark, rich mountain soil and the sweet aroma of honeysuckle was hypnotic. Squatting down she leaned against a poplar tree noticing that one side was almost completely white and the bark was peeled off as if it were a crayon in the hand of an eager child.

Closing her eyes and taking in a deep breath, she began to feel the rush of the water that night and hear the revving of the engine before it gurgled out. The shrill screeches of the car scraping along, being clawed at by the jagged edges of rocks attempting to dissect and reclaim the precious minerals of which it was made. The low lamenting purr of the river as it stretched out and pushed up to the night sky from its banks. The car scooted along with its headlights flashing on and off like a lightening bug trapped in a jar. Bracing herself she put both hands on the steering wheel before the car planted itself nose-first on the bottom, leaving her hanging by the lap belt yelling out in the darkness to Tommy James.

Icy cold water rushed in from the floor to numb her legs as she felt around in the darkness for Tommy James. Hands firmly planted on him she frantically shook his heavy motionless body. The only warmth she felt was from Tommy's blood soaked blue denim shirt. Letting go she fumbled for the lap belt as the water hurriedly rushed around her shoulders with its hard fingers grasping at her neck lifting her out of the car and carrying her away from Tommy James into the cold darkness. Willing herself off the couch and going down to the cellar on a cold winter day to get a can of peas or a jar of shine. Remembering the smell of her mother's hair, her first date and the day she finally said yes. Routine, peaceful and calm.

They had met in high school at Marshall, the school on the island, surrounded by water. The same water that brought them together and pulled them away from each other. Rivers running north felt like time standing still until the current became too strong.

Her parents opposed their relationship; she thought it was because whenever they looked at him they saw their own reflection in more than just his shiny mirrored sunglasses that he never seemed to take off. Broad shouldered and good looking. Her father wanted more for her, something that would last, something she could count on. Whenever she saw him her heart soared, and she would wait for his smile, that half-smile, half-frown.

A year of sitting alongside the river transformed the car into what might be mistaken for folk art. Still brightly colored in places and rusted into odd blends of faded hues, like gasoline in water, in others. Old seat springs and a rusty horn, bits of jagged glass still sticks in the windows and the forlorn steering wheel draped in moss. The rear end is buried with dirt and sprouting vegetation and the rear flanks have taken a beating from target practice.

Pulling the box of white chalk from her top left inside jacket pocket where it was still warm and dry and clutching it in her mouth to keep it out of the water, she scooted down the mud and kudzu-covered bank until her feet dropped into the river. Cold, heavy, and breathless, she waded to the front of the car where it was partially submerged; she climbed onto the rusted hood. Leaning on the roof and taking a piece of chalk in her hand, she paused for a minute, tears beginning to stream down her pale cheeks as she wrote on the roof:

"Happy Anniversary. It is a sorrowful morning, my love. The wind blows and it rains. Sweet hour, blessed hour to carry me to you and to bring you back to me, just long enough to whisper goodbye."

In a low whisper she said out loud, "Sure the neighbors will talk to each other! I see behind their eyes, as they keenly follow my every move, how they carry the pain of my heart like a trophy." Her tone getting flat as she is consumed by anger and spits, "1977 Ford Maverick, 302, V8, automatic, power brakes, power steering. That's all you could talk about. Maverick, the American Muscle. Hell, I think it was all you could think about." Pausing to catch her breath, she began to cry, "And all I could see were dog dish hub caps and you in a ditch or better yet, wrapped around a tree wearing that god damn thread bear pale yellow keep on trucking t-shirt."

"I must say good bye my love for my heart has grown too heavy leaving no room for my soul. Dearest you can not be." She said sobbingly and after a moment of composure she calmly said, "I must let you go to feel summer's shine and hear the signing of birds and the buzzing of bees." She signed her name Mary Katherine and slid off the rusty hood and sloshedinto the river. She felt free of the weight of her heart watching the rain beat on the rusted roof top and the white chalk turn to a muddled paste. Running down the windshield to be routed by its many fractures on its way to be carried away by the current downstream. Standing in the water, still. Letting it carry away with the words and with them the weight of her heart. Letting it go and waiting...still, to feel.

Black Road
by morgan mcnabb

Thought I was a million miles above
but I haven't moved an inch
still standing in our tracks
I touch your arms
see them turning the wheel
bringing me back home
oh, no, It'll never feel right
seeing your sad, dark eyes
darting away from mine

As soon as I turn my head
you'll be gone
so, I'll close my eyes and I'll see

The way we danced
in a dark kitchen
swaying, dreaming of the sea
until the music stops and we do too
waiting, wanting to feel again

As soon as I turn my head
you'll be gone
so, I'll close my eyes and I'll hear

The song we sang
travelling on a dark road
carrying every chord, every verse
until the sun rises
and we float away

As soon as I turn my head
you'll be gone
so, I'll close my eyes and I'll believe

The words we spoke
sitting in a garage blinded by the lamp
speech and body splitting apart
letting go
forever
because we're seen
we can see

Eyes open up and I lose it all
I don't feel a thing

I don't feel a thing

didn't feel a thing

Dancing in February

by kaylyn emory

His back turned,
All you can see
Is his favorite red shirt
And the backs
Of his knobby knees.
But I can still see his big belly,
And the mischievous grin on
My grandfather's face,
His bald head reflecting the light,
As we move back and forth to the music
That he managed to coax out
Of the old speakers minutes before.

A wintry February weekend
The last bit of snow falling
From the dark sky outside,
Turning the ski slopes
A perfect shade of white.
Smells of hot chocolate and coffee
Waft in from the kitchen,
Mingling with wood smoke,
As we dance inside the warm house,
Enjoying the cold weather
Before it warms up in March.
We didn't think much
Of the difference between one month
And the next back then.

My aunt sits perched on the edge
Of the blue checkered couch
Smiling broadly at my grandfather
As he makes up nonsensical lyrics
To the song,

"Oh my dog got caught in a red shoe,
And sailed to an ol' blue..."
As he was prone to do
On long car rides,
Or when he wanted us to smile
"So ol' red dog went down the drain..."

My Nana sits in the chair,
Watching us with a faint smile,
Her head resting on her hand,
The one with the ring
That I've always loved.
She next to dance,
I'll sit and watch them,
Scents of his cologne,
A little cigar smoke still clings
To my pajamas.

I will never forget later that night
When the twinkle returned to his eye
Giggling, as he asked me
If I wanted to hear his poem.
"I shot an arrow into the air
It fell to earth, I know not where."
I lose more damn arrows that way.
His raucous laughter
At his own joke,
Filled the whole room.

Last year, I heard his laughter in October.
Life was so quiet in November.

Night 1

(The curtain opens.)

(The stage is set as a messy room, with a hole in the ceiling through which there is snow falling.)

(An older woman is reading a book.)

(A teenage girl is replacing the hands of a clock with chopsticks.)

(The stage is darkened, with two beams of light of different intensities shining on either the woman or the teenager.)

(They are sitting across from each other through the frame of a broken mirror on either side of the hole in the ceiling as the lights shine on them.)

(The woman smiles at the teenager.)

TEENAGER: Decay.

(The teenager draws pictures of an eye in the snow that has accumulated in the centre of the room.)

(The woman leaves the stage from either the left or right.)

Night 2

(The curtain opens.)

(The stage is set as the same messy room from Night 1.)

(The room is darkened. Neon lights are flickering various colours through the windows on stage.)

(Indistinct laughter is heard from offstage.)

(The sounds of automobile horns and sirens are mixed with the sound of the laughter.)

(The teenage girl is standing in front of the window with her back turned toward the audience.)

(The sounds of the simulated street cease and an indistinct mumbling is heard, to which the teenage girl listens.)

(On the left side of the stage on a table are figurines of cats. A light through the hole is shining on them.)

TEENAGER: Fancy.

Night 3

(The curtain opens.)

(The stage is darkened still.)

(The stage is set up as a bedroom. There is a decrepit bed in the centre of the room.)

(Toward the back of the stage are windows with more neon lighting that is shining through them.)

(Candy dishes are surrounding the bed, each containing a single piece of heart candy.)

(The teenage girl is sitting on the bed. She takes the piece of candy from each dish and eats them while thumbing through the pages of a book.)

(The teenager stands up and begins to waltz around the room, pretending that the book is her partner.)

TEENAGER: One.

Night 4

(The curtain opens.)

(The stage is half lit and half darkened.)

(The stage is set as a bathroom.)

(The older woman from Night 1 is lying unconscious in the bathtub, which is in the light side of the set.)

(The teenager is in the darkened half.)

(A cat figurine is standing on the floor on the verge of the light and dark halves.)

(The teenager is tying a pink bow around it in the dark.)

(When the teenager is finished with this, she opens the door in the darkened half of the stage.)

TEENAGER: Tunnels.

Night 5

(The curtain opens.)

(The stage is dimly lit.)

(The stage is set as the bedroom from Night 3.)

(Newspapers cover the floor.)

(The teenager is jumping on the bed in the centre of the room with a

cat figurine in her hand. There are pieces of a broken record on the bed.)

(On the right side of the stage is a door. It is locked. The sound of someone trying to turn the doorknob is heard.)

TEENAGER: Priestess.

(The sound of someone who is playing a cello is then heard.)

Night 6

(The curtain opens.)

(The stage is dimly lit.)

(The stage is set as the bathroom from Night 4.)

(The teenager is standing by the sink that is set at the back of the stage. She is holding an empty glass.)

(The teenager then drops the glass into the sink, where it then shatters.)

(The teenager picks up the pieces and places them into the soil of a flower pot that is located at the centre of the stage.)

TEENAGER: Beaches.

Night 7

(The curtain opens.)

(The stage is illuminated brightly.)

(The stage is set as a concert.)

(There is an orchestra at the back of the stage.)

(The orchestra is making motions as though they are playing instruments, but no sound is heard.)

(At the centre of the stage are the teenager girl and other actresses who are wearing masks that look like the face of the teenager girl.)

(All of these are dancing in slow, methodical movements.)

(At the conclusion of this dance, the actresses form a horizontal line. Each actress uses a sign to spell a different letter of the teenage girl's name.)

Night 8

(The curtain opens.)

(The stage is dimly lit.)
(The stage is set as the room with the hole in the ceiling from Night 1)

(At the back of the stage, the windows now have venetian blinds on them, through which neon lighting shines through them.)

(There is a record player at a random location on stage. It is turned on and allowed to spin without a record on it.)

(Indistinct voices are heard.)

(On the left side of the room is the door to the bathroom.)

(The teenager is standing against this door.)

TEENAGER: Blue.

Night 9

(The curtain is opened.)

(The stage is darkened.)

(The stage is set as the bathroom from Night 4.)

(A child, either a girl or a boy, turns on a flashlight.)

(The child shines the flashlight on the mirror that is above the sink that is located at the back of the stage.)

(On the mirror in red paint is the word 'FOSSIL' in capital letters.)

(The child then shines the flashlight on the floor in the centre of the stage.)

(The teenage girl is lying there unconscious.)

(The child turns off the flashlight and the stage is completely dark again. At which point, a man's voice can be heard.)

UNKNOWN MAN: Forever.

Curtain

Momentary Glory
by grey lajoie

The snowy third day of spring.
I sit by the window
to keep strangers from seeing me cry
and I notice the beauty
in the fragile white dabs that fall softly through the blue,
spring sunshine glows through them.
They fall in momentary glory
before melting into the damp earth below.

She spends the final hours singing to him.
And I sit in silent marvel,
As she lulls him with old love songs
I am, like him, numb.
Momentarily struck when I approach legend.

He is what a child knew as god.

He is thousands of stories told thousands of times now wrapped up in tubes and tape.
His skin,
harsh and defeated by years of living out myths,
is covered in a layer of time.

He does not get up to rant about carpentry or society or psychology or even sexuality.
He does not wear his glasses

and he does not rise to light another smoke or to fix another drink.
This man does none of those things
because he is only the shattered monument to what we knew.
He lies, not quite silently, but because of the tubes,
he lies making desperate attempts at breaths muffled by fluid,
as if to add further insult.
I cry. Not for this man.
But for my sister and for my brother and for my mother.

Slowly, tubes are removed
and tape is torn off to reveal that tattoo,
that confident green dragon.
Faded, familiar, and for the first time, ephemeral
His glasses rest on his nose once again
and he looks as if he could wake up right now.
But he won't.
He has only returned for this moment to see us off.

I want to remain separate, but they don't let me.
My hand is placed on his bare chest,
over the eyes of the dragon
and as green leaks between my fingers,
I feel him breathe clearly,
for the first time in hours.
He begins with breaths of fire
but with the minutes they become slower and softer
until a point comes where I'm no longer sure if they're still there.
I listen closely for them still.

The Funeral
by virginia lodwick

Grandma and I are in church. I am not sure why, it's not Sunday. The usually half-full church is so packed, many people are lined against the back wall, standing silent and still with a look of waiting on their long faces.

Everyone is wearing black, except for Ms. Dee. She is seated in the center of the middle pew across the aisle from me. My head is turned in her direction, and it's hard not to notice her because of her tall height and because she's dressed in all yellow: a bright yellow dress, yellow heels, and a yellow hat with yellow feathers circling around the rim. Somehow, deep inside, I know I shouldn't stare when she takes out a tube of lipstick from her yellow purse and paints her full lips red.

When women talk about Ms. Dee, they either start or end their sentence with "bless her heart." Listening to their conversations, I reckon it is because she works and sings at Scully's, a hole in the wall juke joint, and because she's single with five kids, all with different daddies.

Keeping in tune with the women folk, I turn to Grandma next to me and tell her, "Bless her heart, Ms. Dee looks like Big Bird!"

"Shhh! Shawn. Be quiet," Grandma says, and looks around her. Grandma is so light skinned I can see red moving up her cheeks as people close to us laugh in soft voices and turn their heads our way. Some, however, glance at me with sad eyes and then whisper to their neighbor. I can't hear all their words, but I do hear someone say, "that poor child."

A big, shiny brown box with gold handles on both ends sits right in the center, below the pulpit at the front of the church. The box is surrounded by the prettiest flowers I've ever seen. I can't wait to tell Daddy all about it when he comes back.

I know I am risking a pinch on my legs by speaking again, but my curiosity gets the best of me, "Grandma, what's that big long box for?" I ask her in a whisper.

The pinch doesn't come. Instead, she takes my hand, they are so small against her large, thin, flat ones. She leans down and whispers back, "it's called a casket. And your Daddy is in it. Like I explained, your daddy is in heaven now with your mommy."

I purse my lips and fold my arms across the new black velvet dress with the girly-girl white frilly lace at the neck. I always believed everything Grandma told me, until now.

My Mommy died five years ago of cancer, when I was two. I don't remember her at all. But I do have a daddy, and although I haven't seen him in five days, I know he would not leave me. My father is a detective, and he's off doing something important.

When Daddy comes back, I am going to let him know about the horrible things Grandma said and did while he was gone. I am going to tell him about how she made me wear this stupid dress, and how I have on Mary Jane shoes. I don't know Mary Jane, but I sure don't want her shoes. I glare down at the shiny black things on my feet. They have a buckle across the front and tiny white flowers painted across the top.

When I look up from my shoes, which should be on a baby-doll, I see Pastor Givens standing at the pulpit. He's a happy, nice man with graying hair and a neat beard. When he laughs, his eyes laugh too.

After a brief prayer, he says a lot of nice things about Daddy, and Grandma cries in low sobs over his words. I've never seen her cry before. Her tears make me feel sad, and I decide to not tattle-tell on her to Daddy. I take ahold of her hand and stroke it, hoping to make her feel better.

I am half-listening to Pastor Givens. I think about Halloween night, the last time I saw Daddy. He took me to a kids' party at the church. I was so tired when we got home, Daddy put me straight to bed without my having to say my prayers or brush my teeth.

The ringing noise woke me up. I heard Daddy answer the phone.

I snuggled under the covers with Humphrey Bear in my arms, and told him to be very quiet so I could hear. I don't remember everything I heard, except for Daddy needing to talk with Tony the shylock at Scully's. *Shylock.* I giggled, what a funny sounding word.

When Daddy hung up the phone, I heard him call Grandma and tell her he had to go and check something out, and would it be okay if he dropped me off for the night?

Grandma must have said yes. Daddy came into my bedroom, woke me from my pretend sleep, and told me he was taking me to Grandma's and would get me in the morning. He didn't come back.

People began to stir in their seats and grab their coats. "We're going to the grave site now to bury Robert," Grandma tells me.

"*Graves are places where peoples' bodies stay while their spirit goes to heaven,*" Daddy explained to me the first time he took me to put flowers on Mommy's grave.

I am beginning to get scared as I watch men wearing identical black shirts and pants, with white gloved hands, pick up the big box and march down the aisle. *Just what if Daddy is in that box.*

After the funeral, by the time we return to Grandma's house, my face is all wet and the top of my velvet dress is stained and soaked from tears and snot, but I don't care. For somehow, I now know, Daddy isn't coming back.

When no one is looking, I run to the closet in the guest bedroom. It feels good to get away from the people who keep trying to soothe me with useless words about Daddy being in a better place.

I hear someone entering the room, and a soft humming. It doesn't sound like Grandma. I sit up in my hiding place and wait, trying hard to be still and to not make a sound, but then I hiccup from all the crying. The closet opens. It's Ms. Dee on the other side. Looking at her in her yellow get-up after spending a good hour in the dark closet is almost like staring at the sun--she's so bright it makes me want to shield my eyes.

She laughs. "Baby don't you know people are beginning to look for you?"

"I guess I have to go back, huh." I say, standing up.

She's quiet for a moment, and places a hand on her womanly hip. "Do you mind some company? Just for awhile?"

I do mind some company, but it's not often a grown-up asks for it, so out of politeness I lie.

She smiles, and the red of her lips has stained onto her teeth. "Come out here," she says, holding out a hand for me to take.

The only place for us to sit is on the bed, so we plop our bottoms side by side onto Grandma's grass green bedspread, it's uglier than the shag carpeting.

"I was looking for the bathroom, and decided to come on in and check my make-up in the mirror," Ms. Dee says as she opens her purse. She pulls a pack of gum out of the folds of the secret place the lipstick appeared from earlier. "Want a piece?" I take one from the open pack.

"They had a nice service for Robert. Shame he was at the wrong place at the wrong time. He sure was a good man. Not many people would try to stop some strung out druggie from shooting that no-good Tony, but your Daddy did." Ms. Dee says.

"My daddy is...was...the best daddy in the whole world." My voice cracks a little as I say it, and I have to swipe at the flowing tears again.

"You're lucky, Shawn."

I stop smacking my gum in mid-chump and glare at her.

"My daddy wasn't the best." She begins, looking down at her long red nails. "Your daddy didn't decide to leave you. Mine did. Cut out on my Mom and me when I was five."

Ms. Dee. Bless her heart. "Did your dad not being there...did the hurt of it ever go away?" I ask.

Ms. Dee took off her hat, placed it on the bed, and then patted burgundy colored curls back into place. "All little girls need their daddies. The hurt inside will never go away. And sometimes, the pain of a young girl not having a father in her life makes her act out in ways she may not be aware of until it's too late."

"Like what?" I ask, really interested.

"Like trying to get the love you didn't get from your daddy from other men."

"Even if they are sorry, trifling, no-good men," she adds with a laugh. She takes my hand again. "You can't bring Robert back, but you can do one thing for him."

"I'll do anything for Daddy Ms. Dee." I say in a whisper.

"Then, baby, be a good girl and make him proud of you."

I let Ms. Dee's words soak over me. And a determination comes over me to do something great with my life. For Daddy. For me. And for Ms. Dee.

I Regret Nothing
by jennafer lee

"I regret nothing!" she screamed into the night

Water pouring down her face

Onto her shoulders, her chest, her legs, her toes

Her poor sodden toes

As she licked the dew of life from the night sky

Lapped it up like so much milk

She laughed suddenly, sharply, startlingly

The sound almost frantic

As she smiled across her face and soul

She felt a pressing urge

And she gave in

Her toes began to wiggle and it moved along her

Infecting each new area as it crept up

And she danced

She laughed and she danced in the rain

The epitome of bliss

And she screamed into the night

"I regret nothing!"

Ms. Mills' Garden
by brian longacre

I was never a little girl even when I was a little girl. How could I be a little girl? Little girls don't have mamas who are always sick or tired, or "sick and tired of being sick and tired" as she say. Little girls don't have brothers who scream and tremble at night because of war friends who visit them in they dreams, "thirsty for dying" as he say. Little girls don't turn off lights at night and make sure the doors are locked once the grown-ups up and go to sleep, exhausted from being grown-ups. And some nights I stay up and sit outside my brother Alvin's door and just pray, hoping that whatever demon is pettin' on his brain will get scared of my praying and just fly off somewhere. Do little girls do that?

Most of my clothes ain't little girl clothes either. Army shirts, football shirts, warm-up pants with waistbands I gotta roll down five or six times just to get my feet free of the pant legs. And I dang sure don't play with dolls like a little girl. I had a doll once, a Barbie doll, one of them yellow-haired white girl dolls, but it wasn't worth nothing, not after Uncle Monkey got hold of it. His name is Leonard, but I call him Uncle Monkey, not because he looks like a monkey, though he does. I call him Uncle Monkey because of how he likes to scratch hisself then smell his fingers. Uncle Monkey took my one Barbie doll, and I don't know if her naked body with just her red shoes on lying on the table was just too much for his little brain or what, but I saw him pick her up, stroke her yellowy, straight hair, staring at her like she was a fried drumstick, then spread her legs and snap one of them right off. Like a wishbone. Even if he hadn't busted her like that, I don't think I could ever play dolls with a doll who's been through that.

Alvin lost his leg too while he was in Iraq, and I have often thought of war as a stupid monster like Uncle Monkey, doing the same thing to soldiers like my brother and his friends. It's like war picks up young men and breaks them up for no reason, leaves them busted so no one wants to play with them anymore. But, truth be told, I'd rather have a broken brother than no brother at all.

Alvin has always been very good to me, even after he came back home full of such horrible dreams, even after I threw his water on him that first night when he scared me to peeing,

grabbing me by both arms like he did and staring at me like a wild cat. But he's been good to Mama and me. He tries to support his own costs, and he helps Mama when she's having her bad days. I guess the only little girl thing I do and have done is suck on popsicles. And I do love my popsicles. I'm eleven, and my name is Cessie.

There's one more person I need to tell you about. At twelve o'clock every day, or there abouts, Ms. Mills, who lives directly across the street, would come out to work in her garden. Now, Ms. Mills is my favorite old lady in the whole world, but truth be told, my old lady list is no bigger than just Ms. Mills, except for Mrs. Buchwald, who lives beside her, but I swear she ain't human (I think she ate her husband years ago because he just up and disappeared and she got really fat), so she don't count. Ms. Mills' garden is small, but it is wonderful. She got collard greens, turnip greens, sweet onions, lettuce, tomatoes (the little cherry kind), squash, corn at one end, and a line of marigolds going all the way around like pretty little scarecrows hoping to scare off the bugs that are just too stupid to know that marigolds are just flowers.

Mama made me promise not to pester Ms. Mills until she come out of her house and get a chance to sit down and say a few private words to her plants and vegetables. I can understand that because she don't have a husband, never did, the plants is all she got, and, truth be told, I can be a little overwhelming at times. So, around 11:50 in the almost p.m., I sit backwards on the couch, on my knees like I'm praying, sucking on a popsicle and watching the world outside like a goldfish in a bowl, just willing Ms. Mills to come on out and visit with her plants, her vegetables, and me.

Well, now that you know about all four people and my popsicles, I can tell you what happened. It was a Thursday, which doesn't really matter except that it has always been my favorite day of the week, being that it's almost Friday, which is almost Saturday. I sat backwards on the couch and watched for Ms. Mills and kept watching for over an hour while the dark, far away part of the sky took over the part over our house, then lightning flashed, then some thunder, then I saw the postman put mail in our mailbox a good bit faster than he normally does. Mama walked by behind me and said, "Looks like a bad one brewing out there."

To her reflection I said, "Yeah, and Ms. Mills still hasn't come out," which I said like a question.

"Tell me when you see Uncle Leonard pull up, 'kay? He's taking me to the pharmacy. You need anything?"

"They let monkey's drive?" I did not say out loud, but laughed as if I had.

Mama stopped in the doorway. "What do you mean Ms. Mills hasn't come outside? It's after one."

I was a little surprised by Mama's surprise, but I kept on looking out the window, wiggling my popsicle stick around in my mouth.

"Alvin?" Mama shouted, which scared me because I imagined Alvin being asleep and who knows who else would be screaming his name inside his sleep. "Come with me over Ms. Mills' house to check on her!" Mama sounded a little scared, which surprised me and bothered me and made me think there might be a real problem.

Outside, it had gone from blue sky to gray, from no rain to waterfallin' and now the thunder was cracking and rumbling as fast as the lightning was flashing. Then, Uncle Monkey pulled up.

"Uncle Leonard's here!" I shouted louder than the storm.

Alvin hobbled out fully dressed wearing his metal leg.

"You all right, Cessie?" I always say yes because I think he need me to say yes, but, truth be told, I usually do feel all right especially because he asks me. Then, he and Mama walked out the front door and from the porch they motioned to Uncle Monkey, who was still in the car, to follow them, then Mama ran through the pouring rain while Alvin lumbered and winced over to Ms. Mills' house. I could have gone too, but I think I knew already that Ms. Mills was not going to be in a good way and I hadn't decided if I needed to see her that way.

I could see them knocking on the door and explaining things to my uncle, probably over-explaining, then I saw them unlock the door and go in. While they were inside, the rain changed to hail and I watched it beating up the earth and everything on it, including Uncle Monkey's pretty new paint job, which Mama told

him looked like nail polish on a dog. They were in that house forever, and I just knew something was really wrong.

After a while, after the storm settled down to a rain again, they all emerged, even Ms. Mills, then Uncle Monkey ran back across the street (and of course he ran stupid too) got in his car without noticing the damage from the hail and pulled up into Ms. Mills' driveway. Once they all helped Ms. Mills into the car, Alvin took the keys and I could tell that he said something unkind and got in, swung his metal leg in and whipped the car around. They paused in front of our house and I could almost hear my Mama saying, "Naw, just go, Cessie's fine, I'm sure she knows where we're going. Just go!" And off they went.

I stayed on that couch, looking out the window, wiggling that gnarled up popsicle stick long after the storm had passed, long after they got Ms. Mills into the hospital, long after the doctor was able to confirm that she had had a stroke and that she would be okay 'cept for her speech and her left arm. I sat and stared out that window almost hearing all of their conversations, almost hearing Mama saying worried things about me being at home and Alvin saying things about how his prosthesis hurts in new places and Uncle Monkey saying something about being hungry hoping that someone would give him money to buy something to eat. And I could almost hear Ms. Mills mumbling to her nurse about how bad it is to get old and about her plants and how much Jesus loves them, but what I couldn't hear was her mumbling in her new voice.

I'm not sure how I got the idea, but while I was staring out the window still on my knees on that couch I asked God to love Ms. Mills especially hard right then so that the stroke wouldn't win, and then I thought of it like God handed it to my brain. I gathered up all the popsicle sticks from the last kitchen drawer, all that I could hold and I got some string and I walked over to Ms. Mills' garden, which was beaten up by all that rain and hailin', and looked over the busted up plants lyin' in the dirt. The garden looked like a scene from one of Alvin's dreams, and I imagined each plant as one of his friends calling out in pain and sadness.

So I got down on my knees just like I was praying, but instead of praying talking, I started praying working, and I took my popsicle sticks and string and I made splints for any broken stems that I thought I could help. I stuck a few sticks into the dirt so that the plants could lean the way Alvin has to lean when

he's not wearing his leg. And, by the time I was finished and covered in mud like blood, I stood up and smiled and I could almost hear the plants resting themselves and whispering little promises like prayers of their own about how they're going to grow up someday and bear fruit and really enjoy the sunshine in the afternoons and offer what they make to people who need them.

But, truth be told, even though I was happy to help those plants, I did it for Ms. Mills and for Mama and for Alvin, and I suppose I did it a little bit for me too because it made me feel good when Ms. Mills got home and Mama was helping her up her walkway and she saw more of what I had done with the popsicle sticks than what the hail had done with its beaten, and then she smiled and winked a little to me, and that's when I realized that what I liked best about Ms. Mills had just taken root in me.

My name is Cecelia, but that day, Ms. Mills called me Cessie because of her new voice, and so I've been Cessie ever since, and I like to think of myself as one of her plants, the only one of my kind.

Where is Everyone?
by leisa payne

We walk the city late at night
My red dog wears a blue cape

Cross the street turn the corner pick up the pace
Pass the standing blue bird holding a patchwork heart

This is the place I live
Where black dogs bark at a blue moon

Cradled in solitude
Under a blanket of yellow stars

I look for everyone when I look back
Black dogs have red wheels for feet

When I fall down
Inside in the day time

I fall for everyone
Outside in the night time

A Room for Rest (an editorial)
by Jeff Horner

I live a short downhill run from the French Broad Park in West Asheville. It takes me pulling on my Vibram five-finger shoes and loping down the half-mile of blind turns before I'm in the parking lot. What I find is idyllic. Serpentine paths and the low-hanging bridge frame the river. Benches and grills dot the grounds like invitations to unplanned events. A gazebo stands quiet guard near the park's swing-set.

In the center stands a solid stone public restroom. I often jog-in mid-run and sit in a stall. I hear people meander by. The river whispers always in the background. The hopeful ring of a child's laughter as they swing calms the mind as I, peacefully and joyfully, take an enormous shit.

That's a jarring image I enjoy. Disgust is certainly a natural reaction. No one likes discussing the bowels of other people. No one likes considering how often we relieve ourselves in public. But sitting in my river park stall, contemplating a thousand stalls of my past, I begin wondering if we're missing a connective, equalizing moment.

And I consider the work restroom. Most of my sad, disparate resume is composed of service industry jobs. This kind of work is filled with unique stresses: odd hours, poor pay, needy clients and employees. The rewards are few and mostly philosophical. Grabbing a beer with old co-workers quickly turns into a war reunion. "Remember the Super Bowl the pilot light kept going out?" "Remember the Black Friday we ran out of Harry Potter books by noon?" We laugh sadly. Ours was not to reason why. Ours was but to serve and die.

I told my employees I had two hard rules: (1) work diligently and I'll support you and (2) leave me alone in the bathroom. It was a profound experience during high-stress moments to sit on a toilet without needing to relieve myself of anything more than human presence. And to relax. And breathe slowly and think of nothing. In this respect, the little space became a temple of inner peace; the sanctity of the bowl.

The military offered a decidedly different poo experience. I joined the navy as a teenager and was whisked off to Chicago for boot camp before I could change my mind. Enter the "head": eight toilets sticking out of the wall in a row without any partitions between them. You could see the showers from where you shat. Suddenly, strangers from around the country were sharing their most intimate moments. The shock of it left several recruits unable to "go" for the first week. But time and turds move on. Soon, the movements of the division could set a crap clock. Soon, every recruit felt comfortable chatting about anything with a crapping neighbor. And how the porcelain sang.

It was freeing; the combination of a spiritual and physical movement; the Temple of Letting Go. The restroom became a sanctuary of a different denomination. If that locked work stall was my Zen garden, the eight toilets were my Baptist choir.

I hope a ridiculous point is floating up to the rim of your

mind. I hope you're getting a sense of what I find odd about what we pretend doesn't happen.

Because I do get it. I know how cute I'm playing this particular point. There's a reason it's easier to say "peepee" and "poopoo" to kids. There's a reason we still giggle or frown when the subject comes up in mixed company. It's messy and smelly. It feels like a weakness, like a breakdown of our bodies we won't admit to, but it's a weakness we all share. No one escapes digestion. So does the strength of the taboo really match the act itself?

We talk about many other dirty things with absolute joy. Consider our food obsession. The laws food-handlers follow involve a lot more than just after bathroom wash-up. Those of us who've worked kitchens know how nasty it can get during those peak hours. Yet there are entire cable networks devoted to discussing cooking. Not once does anyone mention what happens a few hours after you eat ("Up next on 'The Bowl', 'Pimp My Shitter'").

Or have you ever been eating out, enjoyed a nice meal, then found the establishment's facilities to be filthy? How important does the nice meal seem now in your opinion of the place?

Try sticking your nose into your local gym. Take a healthy whiff. Smell the sweat and farts of a thousand hopeful bodies. Old socks soaked in effort; padded floors absorbing the odors of fatigue and ass. But fitness is an enormous, loud American industry. We want to know who "The Biggest Loser" is. We read articles about who has the best (and worst) beach body. That stink is considered a source of pride. Work well done. It is still a stink. The work of the public poop could be a source of pride as well.

And why do we forget how many memories we cherish were quietly centered – like my little park – by a public restroom? Was it your friend's wedding and you in a stall, smiling, reflecting on what lead you to that moment? Or randomly laughing with some stranger at the urinal next to you during a particularly poignant night out? Maybe my favorite: that magical rest-stop that arrives just in time. You stretch your legs, empty your bowels, and recommit yourself to the adventure. While life is rolling on, our waste is rolling out and the restroom helps manage that for us.

I'm only suggesting a tiny revolution. I'm not demanding we tear down these tiled walls that separate us from the truth (although it would help). I'm not asking you to confront every fellow public restroom-er with forced cheeriness (because that may ruin their sanctuary). I just want the restroom to be considered more; to be appreciated more for its many spectacular functions. I just want you to thank a custodian next time you see one. They know how much worse the things we hide smell.

My father used to remind me, when he felt I was getting too "big for my britches", that I should stop acting like my "shit don't stink". He's right. It does. So does yours. All of our shit stinks, from the most powerful to the meekest. I suggest we embrace it.

So, shit in peace, friends. Shit with joy. Shit with the knowledge that the infinite shits before and after yours, stretching out across human existence, connect us all. The public restroom is the vehicle driving us across that limitless plane. There might not be a more sincere human experience. Amen.

Hoping for a New Normal (an editorial)

by mariah harban

I want a normal life. Is that okay to say anymore? Can I sit back and twiddle my toes while I watch my son laugh at his favorite TV show, *The Octonauts*? Can I wonder, with mundane curiosity, what time my eleven month old will decide to violently wake me in the morning (usually around 4:45 am, just for the record)? Being a mother is my most sacred and precious role. It is a role I didn't even know I wanted until it happened. But I love it, and I cherish it. Every day I get to watch someone learn a fundamental lesson about being alive and I get to see the excitement on his face while it happens. Every day my son reminds me that childish innocence, like a toothless grin at the sight of a strawberry being carted towards a high-chair tray, is not just one more thing to be exploited and over-produced by Disney, or whomever. But that doesn't mean that everyday is perfect. In fact, most days I wake up hoping for the best, but knowing better than to expect it.

There is pressure on all parents to be perfect. To always make the best decision, to always have the healthiest meals and offer the most educational entertainment, and to never be the parent of that toddler who throws himself on the floor of the grocery store when you reject his pleas to purchase a cart full of candy canes and orange soda. In some ways, it doesn't matter what your socioeconomic status is, or your religion, or how old you are. There are some judgments that all parents must endure when they enter the treacherous world of child rearing. We all must battle the "well, if I were you..." comments, and unsolicited advice from strangers at the mall. But I have found that there are some sideways glances and under-the-breath judgments reserved solely for those of us who are young and poor. Yes, I said it: poor. I may love my life, but that doesn't mean I can't feel the looks in the lobby while my son slams his fists against my thighs, begging me to take him somewhere more exciting than the financial aid office. It doesn't mean I don't notice the the woman at the doctor's office that glances at my left hand searching for a ring. It means I get over these things, but it doesn't mean I don't see them. I am amazed at how often I, and people I speak to regularly, encounter judgment regarding those who juggle parenting, work, and school at a young age.

Before my son was born I thought school was hard. It was an enormous obstacle between me and the next time I could meet my friends at the bar. Then, I didn't even know what hard meant. These days, hard means waking up at 5 am and playing peek-a-boo for an hour and a half before even thinking about coffee or breakfast; it means being so exhausted your eyes tear up when you hear words like "sleep" or "privacy" because you don't remember what those things feel like. Sometimes hard is stirring dinner with a baby on your hip who just wants to dip his fat little hand into a pot of boiling water, or typing an essay with one hand while feeding the baby with the other. Often, it means questioning whether or not staying in school is the right choice. It

has been hard for me to learn how to set a good example for my son, to be proud of my life and where it's going, all while battling my own fear that people only see me as one thing: accidental mother. Sure, it's irrational to think that. Most people I see at school, or anywhere I go without my son regularly, probably don't even know I have a child. They probably wouldn't care if they did know. But how can I avoid twenty-two years of socialization in a patriarchal culture that can only see what a woman can offer if there's a man beside her? How can anyone ignore the constant barrage of messages, filling our heads with judgments about anyone who doesn't fit into an idealized societal box?

We are raised in a culture that promotes the idea that it's okay for women to make less than a man for the same job, it's okay for women to have their bodily rights discussed in a public forum, and it's okay to view young mothers as irresponsible and single mothers as unfit. I want to be a human that exudes the joy I feel when my son takes his first step, even if it happens while I'm writing an essay or simplifying fractions. I do not want to be a person who looks at the floor when someone asks me how old I am while my son clutches the corner of my jacket.

So I won't be. I won't be that person. Instead, I will be the person who deeply appreciates each piece of raspberry pressed carefully into the carpet after my son's morning snack. As I pull up bits of berry and scrub the remaining juice, I will happily remind myself that each mess that my well-meaning son leaves behind is a tiny token of his person-hood and his autonomy. The more he grows, the fewer berry-filled messy mornings I will have with him. So, I will be the person who rambles endlessly about growth spurts and milestones. I will whip out pictures at every turn. I will almost certainly be the annoying mother that everyone blocks on Facebook and politely ignores in person. I will be that person because I would rather be annoying because of my joy than annoying because of my fear.

I get to wake up every day and know that each action I take pride in and each accomplishment I do not hide is one more step towards changing the judgment and misinformation about young mothers. I have a beautiful and unique opportunity each day that I wake up to be apart of the change I want to see in the world. For my son, for my joy, and for all parents from all walks of life trying their damnedest to find the right path, I am grateful. For spilled juice in my purse, little fingers under the bathroom door, and early morning kisses that leave little droppings of berry on my cheek, I am grateful.

contributors

Abigail Batton:
Abigail remains facinated by all things related to the language, good food and good company. "Good," here, is defined as juicy, delicious, intriguing, savory, sweet and memorable.

Forest Beaudet:
Forest has been writing since he was seven and decided he'd rather write about the River Dance than see it. He spends most of his time hiking, writing papers, and generally just pretending he's slightly cooler than he is.

Mark Cancilla:
Mark was born in Buffalo, NY. "Travel often no matter how close or far. Just don't forget to look around and take notice of where you are."

Adam Carnes:
Adam currently is a full time student at A-B Tech with plans to transfer to a university at the beginning of 2014. He has refocused his career goals to include assisted technologies and its implementation to improve communication between patients, family, and medical staff in modern healthcare settings. Writing poetry helps to open the creative pathways of connection and supplies productive solutions to everyday thoughts and motion.

Mallory Chambliss:
Mallory finished the GIS certification at AB Tech in spring of 2012. She has journaled and written poems and short stories throughout her adult life. Writing, for her, is a wonderful means of creative expression often leading to self-discovery and freshened life-perspective. She is currently looking for new ways to share and publish writing. Her current favorite novel is *Brave New World* and my current favorite movie is *Cloud Atlas.*

Nez Covington:
Nez is a 17 year old who is in her fourth semester here at AB-Tech with the Early College program. She has been writing since she was very young, and would like to thank Ms. Yesho Atil for inspiring her to submit to *The Rhapsodist.* Nez is also the main vocalist and electric violinist in a local band, is an artist and an aspiring linguist, and has a dream to one day to become a theoretical physicist.

Kaylyn Emory:
Kaylyn has lived in Weaverville all her life. She has always loved reading and has recently discovered a love of writing and an appreciation for words themselves as well. She appreciates the opportunity to share a piece of herself with others.

Jonathan Ganong:
Jonathan is an art history major aspiring to be a professor and looking forward to a long career in school and debt. He is currently working on a graphic novel and lives in West Asheville with his pug, Reginald Thoroughgood.

Aidan Grennell:
Aidan is in his last semester at AB Tech, and will graduate this spring with his Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees. He will continue his education at Western Carolina University in the Fall of 2013, pursuing a double major in Math and English. Ultimately, Aidan hopes to teach, write, and work within professional ministry through Metropolitan Community Churches.

Erica Halliman:
Erica is originally from south Florida. She moved to Asheville with her family as a child. She has lived all across the United States, from California to New York, but the mountains have always been where she has felt the most at home. Erica is currently working towards an Associates of Arts degree at A-B Tech; upon completion, she intends to switch gears and continue with a focus in Mathematics.

Clint Hunnicutt:
Clint has always enjoyed writing, often using his spare time to plan and write stories. He is at the point in his life where he has to make a decision on a career, and unfortunately, hasn't yet come up with an answer. This is the first time anything he has written has ever been published, and he hopes that *The Rhapsodist* may be opening the door to something bigger.

contributors

Jeff Horner:
Jeff is old but not like Larry King old. He's enjoying his second go-around as a student tremendously. Jeff enjoys writing, DVR recordings of Jeopardy, and nude bowling. Don't worry, it's not you, it's him.

Heidi Kouri:
Heidi is an urban homesteader and herbalist living in West Asheville. She is currently working towards her Bachelor's Degree in Nursing. When she's not too busy doing homework, Heidi can be found tending her garden or caring for her chickens and angora rabbits.

Grey Lajoie:
Grey has lived in Asheville all of his 21 years. Grey is an unpublished children's bookwriter and illustrator, being the progenitor of *The Heavy Headed Man.* Grey is a self-proclaimed devout romantic, amateur existent, and word inventorator.

Jenna Lee:
Jenna moved to Asheville from Spokane, WA. While she has dabbled in everything from volleyball to theater and even Mathletes for a time, writing has always been her first love. She plan on transferring to UNCA to obtain my Bachelor's in English. This is the first time she has shared her work in this manner, and she is thoroughly pleased with the result!

Brian Longacre:
Brian decided to major in English when it became clear that the classes he most wanted to take were all related to language and its artistry. He began teaching English when it became clear that he could introduce others to its beauty. Reading and writing have been the essential building blocks of his life, and they have afforded him adventures throughout the world and across human experience.

Virginia Lodwick:
Virginia enjoys baking home-made goodies from scratch. She is currently working on a novel, and she is a returning student with plans to major in Accounting and Office Technology.

Jeffrey (Andy) Marshall:
Andy spends his time glaring at his keyboard in his luxurious double-wide home in the thriving metropolis of Swannanoa, North Carolina. His future plans include becoming a therapist, seeing a therapist, building a family, and learning to communicate with animals and small children. He is 24. He is no longer single, so please stop asking.

Morgan McNabb:
Morgan spends a great amount of time attempting to turn lights on in places that have always been unlit. Writing downs words that run through her mind helps her with the process. She finds expression to be the truest journey of them all.

Whitney O'Friel:
Whitney has loved taking pictures since she was ten and hopes to be taking them when she's a hundred and ten. She has three grown kids who sometimes model for her when they're not too busy and a dog and cat who have no choice. She is working on learning the many layers of Photoshop and thanks her teacher, Lynette Miller, for her infinite patience.

Linda Orndorf:
Lin is completing her A.A.S. degree in Sustainable Technologies at A-B Tech after 20 years of trying out various other careers including environmental technician, bookseller, magazine production manager, newspaper editor, and cafe owner. Originally from the Philadelphia area, Lin is an urbanphile with hopes of making our cities more sustainable places to live. When not in class, studying, writing, or carrying out her duties as SGA President, she stays busy making her own home more sustainable for her family, including her partner, 2 dogs, and 4 cats. It's a zoo at her house, but that's the only way she'll have it.

Leisa Payne:
Leisa is an Asheville native. She plans to pursue an English Creative Writing double major with a Teaching Certification and has an outlandish fascination with science, animals and human nature.

contributors

Tequila Petty:
Tequila has lived in Asheville all her life and is currently attending her second year at AB-Tech in hopes of obtaining a career in nursing and psychology. She couldn't imagine her life without writing. She aims to make a difference through her work. She appreciates everyone who reads her work and hopes to share more in the future.

Taylor Phillips:
Taylor is a high school dropout, university dropout, unemployed and not a fan of self-indulgent, third-person autobiographies.

Carolyn Pidgeon:
Carolyn majored in philosophy and then obtained a Master's in elementary education. She has been writing poetry since she was nine. For the past thirteen years she has taught in the compensatory education department of A-B Tech. She has also finished her first novel which she is in the process of revising for the second time. Other hobbies are gardening and playing the guitar.

Kadie Sanders:
Kadie currently works with the Small Business Incubator Program to develop her dreams to operate a creative services business out of a public working studio. Her disciplines are in artistic entertainment, decoration, and custom art. Her long term goal transforms this business into an art therapy practice.

Stacie Sexton:
Stacie Sexton hails from the mountains of southeastern Kentucky and is proud to call Appalachia her home. She is currently studying anthropology and will transfer to UNCA to complete her degree. Her ultimate goal is to pursue a career in medicine and to remind parents everywhere that rock 'n' roll ain't noise pollution.

Timothy Steparnen:
Timothy writes poetry from a cosmic and unknowable perspective. He also likes to create dark, melancholy fiction as well as modern fairy tales and sentimental novels for children.

Amanda Watkins:
Amanda has had a love for art since she was a child, and has always made it her business to create. She's working her way through school with a family in tow, and finds peace in her passion for art.

Beverly Williamson:
Beverly is an adjunct instructor at A-B Tech and lives in Asheville with her husband and son. She has previously been published in *The Laurel* and *The Great Smokies Review*. This excerpt is from her first novel.

Jacob Wishon:
Jacob really delved into his writing more when he had a couple of rough first years in college. It was a way to clear his head. Since then, he's realized an interest in journalism, and wishes to pursue a career in this field.

Kelley Wheeler:
Kelly was born in Asheville and has lived here most of her life. She returned to school after over ten years of being a stay-at-home Mom. This is her second year at AB Tech, earning an AFA. After graduation, she plans to transfer to Western Carolina to pursue a BFA.

Interested in submitting your creative writing or artwork to *The Rhapsodist*?

We will begin accepting submissions for our next issue in September 2013.

Check out our *Facebook* page for details (The Rhapsodist Literary Arts Journal).

Send all queries to rhapsodistjournal@gmail.com

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